

DUKE

by

JOHN BEAMES

who wrote

"Army Without Banners" ★

★ **"Moving and lovely. There is a Virgilian beauty in this epic of Canadian soil."**

EVENING STANDARD

"DUKE"

by
JOHN BEAMES

Author of
"Army Without Banners" and "Gateway"

"The history of the West is one of alternate boom and slump, of money tossed to the winds and of no money at all. They do nothing by halves on the prairie, and every community has had at least one boom in its short life; some have had several. I went into one such with empty pockets but a good pair of boots, rose to be manager of a wildcat newspaper, and glimpsed the pot of gold at the rainbow's foot. The boom blew up, a frosty-hearted bailiff seized my newspaper; I was broke again, and unfortunately my boots were worn out too."—*The Author*

John Beames, with "Army Without Banners," "Gateway," and now "Duke" to his credit, obviously has first hand knowledge and experience of the 'Wild West' of which he writes so vividly.

"Duke" fulfils the promise of the first two books, both of which were exceptionally well received.

*For reviews of Mr. Beames' previous novels
see the back flap of this jacket*

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by John Beames
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DUKE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
ARMY WITHOUT BANNERS
GATEWAY

DUKE

By

JOHN BEAMES



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CHAPTER I

MARMADUKE CUTHBERT MING got off at Gateway. The train went no further, and from the banks of the Sweet-water to the Arctic there stretched the Northern wilderness.

Ming was tall and lean-flanked, and his face was mostly nose—a questing, restless, thrusting, impetuous, mobile nose. He had very bright blue eyes, keen and audacious, sandy eyebrows, and a mouth that was a little crooked. The consciousness that life is essentially ridiculous and a little pitiful was seldom far from him. He was twenty-seven years old.

He wore an old felt hat over one eye, a faded and shiny suit of blue serge, a high linen collar two sizes too large for his sinewy throat, and brown shoes that were not new. He carried a leather valise of English make, which, like its owner, had travelled a great deal in questionable company, was a little worn and somewhat pinched.

He looked across a lumber yard at a long low building crowning a steep slope. It had a square tower and barred windows, and wore the lowering aspect inseparable from jails and lunatic asylums. He turned his glance in the opposite direction and saw a red brick church tower rising above the roofs.

He smiled whimsically. “A church—and a jail,” he murmured. “All the refinements of civilization, and this is supposed to be a howling wilderness. Let’s see what else there is.”

He picked up his bag and passed by the row of buses with their vociferous porters drawn up by the wooden platform, and proceeded down Maple Avenue toward the river.

This was Gateway's main thoroughfare, boasting a broad cement walk on each side, but with a roadway that was merely native mud under a thin coating of gravel. It was early May and it had been raining. The road was a foot deep in churned mire, but the cross streets were only saved from being bottomless bogs by the fact that the winter frost was not yet out of the ground.

The buildings were scattered ; here a substantial pile of brick, there a decaying log shanty ; again a patch of black soil devoted to potatoes, or a grassy vacant lot upon which grazed a tethered cow.

Ming passed two hotels, but they were on the far side of the street, and there seemed no way to get over to them short of flying. It was not until he had almost reached the river that he came to a weather-beaten frame building which announced itself as the Palace Hotel.

He entered. The lobby was low and dark and furnished with heavy wooden chairs not easily destroyed in a brawl, and large brass spittoons useful upon occasion as missiles. A swinging door led into the bar, whence proceeded discordant noises and an over-powering smell of bad whiskey and worse cigars.

At the counter there stood a short corpulent man with a round pale face running up to a narrow hairless skull. His small black eyes were set flat in his face ; he had a little round nose, and a thick, pursed-up mouth, through which he breathed with a whistling noise.

"Can I have a room?" asked Ming.

The fat clerk put a broad hand behind one ear.

"Can't give you a room if that's what you want," he wheezed. "Give you a cot some place or you can bunk in the pool-room after eleven at night—whole place full up."

The bar-room door swung open, and there pranced into the lobby a young man in a gaudy mackinaw shirt, trousers cut off at the knee, bright red socks and high rivermen's boots with sharp steel caulks in the soles.

"Hey, Whistling Bob," he shouted. "Bob."

The fat clerk cupped his ear and inclined his head.

The river pig bent confidentially over him, leaped back with an ear-splitting yell, and fled into the bar again. There burst out a lunatic chorus of howls and demoniac laughter.

Whistling Bob pulled a large red handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his face.

"A pity somebody wouldn't think up a new joke," he grumbled. "That's the third bum spit in my ear to-day. Wisht to hell they'd go to fightin' an' forget about me."

His pious wish was swiftly fulfilled. There was a crash, shouts, the sound of blows and breaking glass from the bar. Ming peeped through the swing-door. In the dim and smoke-laden atmosphere between forty and fifty lumberjacks seemed to be indulging in a general massacre.

"By Jove, they'll be killing somebody!" he cried.

"What's 'at?"

"They're jumping on each other with spiked boots," bawled Ming. "Somebody'll get killed."

Bob shook his head with the calm of long experience. "Just havin' a little fun, that's all. Some of 'em'll likely get caulked up a little; but it ain't, you know, like a real scrap. Just fun."

The noise was appalling, the building was shaken to its rotting foundations, but it ended as suddenly as it had begun. Ming beheld the combatants pouring out into the street, where they moved off in a body, yelling like maniacs.

"Just a gang makin' the rounds," explained Bob. "Got in off of the river drive this mornin' an' want to see life. They'll go on now an' raise a little hell at the Imperial an' the Gateway House, an' up to the King's. It'll be quiet around here for a hour or so, an' then they'll work around back an' do it all over."

Two river pigs entered from the bar, supporting between them a ghastly object. The man's entire face seemed to have been torn off.

"Poor Bud," said one of the men tenderly. "The poor lad fell down an' some damn fool kinder walked on his face."

"I'm all right," maintained the wounded man in a surly voice. "No call to get excited, just a little blood—some dirty dog-eater tripped me. I'm a-goin' out an' find that guy an' rip the liver out of him. It's a pity a man couldn't have a little fun but what some louse bait got to step on his face."

Ming picked up his bag and walked out.

"I seem to have struck a nice quiet little town," he reflected. "In Buenos Ayres they use knives, here they used spiked boots: you pays your money and you takes your choice."

All the hotels in town were full except the St. Joseph's, and the rates there were three dollars a day. Ming's purse was lean, and he set out to look for a private house. These were scattered at intervals along muddy streets parallel with the river, and he found one at last that announced board and room on a card in the window. A very fat, brilliantly blonde woman answered his knock.

"I can put you in with a nice young feller," she offered. "Ain't got a single room in the house—town's awful full."

Evening was near and Ming was tired. It seemed that he might go further only to fare worse. So he gave the fat woman the five dollars she asked, and was shown to a tiny room containing a double bed, a washstand and one chair. There was no water in the jug.

"The boys washes down in the kitchen," explained the fat woman. "Saves me haulin' water upstairs."

Ming returned with her to the parlour. Here were a large stove, a pine table covered with oil-cloth, and eight or nine stout kitchen chairs. There were some gaudy calendars on the walls, and an enlarged photograph in a gilt frame of a walrus-moustached man with big ears.

"Mr. Midger," said the fat woman, pointing. "Dead six years he is—got run over in the yards in Moose Jaw one night in a blizzard. He was yard-foreman for the C.P. Everybody's always askin' why I don't marry again."

She giggled and rolled prominent blue eyes at him. He did not respond: she was no longer young, he suspected the colour of her hair, and fat women had no charm for him.

"Well, well," she said after a provocative pause, "I best rustle around, I guess. Have all the boys in here in a minute bawlin' for grub."

She gave him another languishing glance, giggled again, and went out. He could hear her rattling dishes in the kitchen, and singing in a thin voice what sounded like a hymn.

"This," he reflected, "is what they call a dump in this country, I guess. Reminds me of Mother Jinnia's hangout in Sydney."

The door opened to admit two men. Ming's first shocked impression was that they were negroes, but a second glance showed him that they were railway mechanics from the roundhouse, grimed with grease and soot. They gave him an indifferent stare and passed into the kitchen, where they greeted Mrs. Midger with effusion and loud demands for hot water.

There entered successively a short man with a neat black moustache and a sly manner; an elderly, stooped man, with a melancholy eye and a wart on his chin; a red-headed, burly, lowering fellow, smelling like a whole livery barn; and a very slender young man in a paint-spotted white jacket, with one large, open, placid eye, and one small, screwed-up, restless eye.

Ming wondered which of them all was to be his room-mate, and was not much drawn to any.

Mrs. Midger announced supper. She gave Ming the place on her right, and introduced him to the young painter with the ill-matched eyes.

"This is Mr. Kroge, Mr. Ming. He'll be in with you."

Kroge gave a sickly smile and murmured something

inaudible. Ming decided that he was probably the least objectionable of his fellow-boarders. The smell of paint was at least preferable to that of horses or of black grease.

The others took little notice of him. The sly man sat at Mrs. Midger's left and spoke to her occasionally in confidential asides. One of the railway mechanics was evidently the accredited jester. He had a harsh voice and a braying laugh, and kept up a continual fire of feeble witticisms with a double meaning. His subject seemed to be the amorous adventures of his landlady.

His frequent references to star boarders brought a flash to the sallow cheeks of the sly man, but Mrs. Midger giggled, and her prominent blue eyes roamed coquettishly over the table.

The food was far better than Ming had hoped for. It appeared that for all her amiable weaknesses, Mrs. Midger was a good cook, which is probably the rarest of feminine accomplishments.

The red-headed man lowered his head and snuffed at his food before eating. Without reference to anyone else he told an endless tale of getting stuck in the mud with his team and a load of gravel. He had a strong Scotch accent, and a profound contempt for western Canadian roads.

"This country ain't what I thought it would be, ah, that it ain't," said the elderly man with the wart on his chin. "The tales they told me in England before I came out 'ere you wouldn't 'ardly believe—awful lies they was, awful."

Nobody paying him any attention, he sighed and was silent.

All eating very earnestly, the meal was soon despatched, and the boarders returned to the parlour. The young railwaymen took their hats and went out with the loudly expressed intention of getting drunk; the Scot filled his pipe with rank tobacco and went on with his monologue; the elderly Englishman sitting by, waiting eagerly for an opportunity to air his own grievances. Kroge went upstairs and came down again very neatly dressed.

“Goin’ to see the girl, Tom?” giggled Mrs. Midger.

Kroge gave another sickly grin, nodded, and slipped out. Mrs. Midger passed into her own private apartment opening off the parlour, in company with the sly man.

Profoundly bored, Ming picked up his hat and went out for an aimless ramble.

It was cool and windless and the air was sweet. A tender northern twilight reigned; the sun, just under the rim of the world, illuminating a few little clouds high up, tinting them rose and gold against a sky of pale and lucent green.

All Gateway was perambulating up and down Maple Avenue and Water Street. All the bars were open and doing a large business. Terrifying whoops testified that the lumberjacks were still celebrating. There were not very many women on the street, and it was not difficult to divine the profession of most of those who were.

There arose a particularly violent disturbance outside the Imperial bar. From the crowd which quickly gathered there emerged four big policemen, dragging with them two struggling, blaspheming river pigs.

Ming heard a tall lumberjack lift his voice in lamentation and prophecy.

"This here town ain't what it used to was—it's all shot to blazes. What harm was them two poor lads doin'? Just fightin', just the two of 'em. Well, it's a hell of a note if a couple of good fellers can't put on a little scrap without the police have to butt in."

"You're right, Jerry old scout, you're damn right," said a thickset lumberjack with a black eye and one sleeve missing.

"It's too many white-collar stiff's got into this here town," continued the second Jeremiah in tones the elder prophet might have envied. "It's that stinkin' respectable these days they won't leave a feller get even smilin' drunk but what they pinch him. The shanty boys is goin' to pull out pretty soon an' leave this town cold on its hind-end, it an' its yaller-bellied, white-collar, sissified, pukin' bastards. It's no good no more—it's played out—it's civilized up. When they put a feller in the hoosegow only for fightin' on the street, it ain't no place for shanty boys any more."

The crowd dispersed slowly, and Ming walked down to the river and turned west along Water Street. The wide expanse of the Sweetwater reflected the faint radiance that still lingered in the sky. Delicate new leaves on poplar and willow rustled sibilantly in the vagrant airs that ruffled the surface of the water.

He turned his back on the raw and hideous town, and walked out upon the almost completed railroad bridge, the first that had ever spanned the Sweetwater. He hung over the rail and looked down upon the purling water.

A gentle and not unpleasing melancholy fell upon him. For a little while his restless and unquiet spirit was at peace, the urge to be elsewhere was still. To every nomad there comes at intervals a strong desire to settle down in a permanent abiding place.

"If I can get a decent job, I believe I'll stay here," he mused. "Somehow I like this place. Knocking about the world doesn't seem to have done me much good. I'm getting on—soon be thirty—and I haven't a penny to bless myself with. Yes, I think I'll stay."

He walked to the end of the bridge and saw a raw grade pushing out into a forested wilderness, and then turned homeward. Infrequent arc lights illuminated the muddy street crossings; some noise still proceeded from the bars, but all sober citizens were now within doors. He came upon a lumberjack sitting on the edge of the sidewalk with his feet in the mud and his face in his hands, sobbing broken-heartedly. Two more river pigs, maudlin drunk, sought to console him.

"I've give you two good snorts out of my bottle," said one. "An' I got to have some for the mornin', ain't I? An' I give you a chew of tobacco, didn't I? An' I been your good friend, ain't I? You never did have a friend like what I been to you, Sammy, I bet you ain't. So let up bawlin', Sammy, do it for my sake, eh? Do it for my sake."

"I ain't goin' to let up," wailed the disconsolate one. "I got a license to bawl. I ain't been used right I ain't. That Chink put pepper in the chow, I know well he did. Think I don't know what pepper is? An' I'd killed him right there, only for you two, I'd killed him right there. An' you got to butt in an' ruin me, an' if that's bein'

good friends of mine, what I says is, guts, that's what I says. An' I have so got a license to bawl."

The third lumberjack found himself in acute disagreement with the statement. "No, you ain't got no such a license, Sam Hooper. No, sir. What's more, now I'm tellin' you, I stood for plenty of you now. Are you goin' to let up on that racket an' come along or ain't you?"

"No, I ain't," said Sammy stoutly and defiantly. "I wouldn't go to a dog fight with you, not if I was drunk even."

"Oh, you wouldn't, eh? That's the kind of a friend you are, is it? Now I'm onto you. Nor I didn't ask you to come to no dog fight, you know well I didn't. Nor I wouldn't come neither, see?"

With sudden ferocity, "What in hell you mean? I'll learn you about dog fights. Eat mud, you bum, eat mud."

He gripped the seated man by the back of the neck and flung him violently on his face in the road.

"Now lay there, blast you. Hog in wallow, hog in wallow. Come on, Barney, didn't I do right, Barney?"

Barney shook hands with him solemnly. "You done right, Jim, you done right. He had it comin' to him."

Linking arms affectionately they staggered away. Sam reeled to his feet, wiped the mud out of his eyes, and stumbled after them, bleating pathetically, "Barney, O Barney. Wa-ait for me, Barney."

Still chuckling, Ming reached his boarding-house. The light was on in the empty parlour, and Mrs. Midger's voice raised in shrill wrath penetrated the thin partition.

He did not linger to eavesdrop, but went at once to his room.

Soon the two railroaders came in. They were noisy, but he suspected their intoxication was largely feigned. They talked and laughed loudly for a few minutes in the next room and were then silent. Ming was half asleep when Kroge entered.

The painter sat down by the bed and fumbled with his face. "Damn this eye," he grumbled, "it's always waterin'." The large placid eye came out in his hand. Ming gasped. "Glass," explained Kroge. "Da-amn the thing."

He continued to talk in a low fretful growl while undressing. "Hear old Cotton-top givin' Springer the devil downstairs. She puts p'roxide or something on her hair. She's a gimme from way back, she is. Gimme, gimme, gimme. Springer's a fool."

"Why don't they get married?" asked Ming.

"Who, her? Get married? Not much, nk-nk, she likes to change 'em early an' often. Springer's the third since I come here a little better'n a year ago. Star boarders, huh, I wouldn't stay in this dump only Cotton-top is cheap enough, an' she sure can sling the chuck. I'll say this for her, she's no belly-robber. But I'm gettin' married next month, an' then to hell with boardin'-houses."

He switched out the light and got into bed.

"Boss is puttin' me on a rush job to-morrow. If I get in some overtime, I might make twenty-five bucks next week, an' a feller needs the money when he's gettin' married. Guess I'd best go to sleep."

CHAPTER II

BREAKFAST was at seven. The day was bright and warm, and the muddy streets drying with wonderful rapidity under a brisk wind when Ming set out to look for a job. He had put on a clean collar and carefully brushed his faded suit.

There was plenty of activity in the town. He observed three large excavations being made for buildings ; gangs of men were digging sewers, work was proceeding on the railway bridge, and steel was being laid upon the grade across the river.

He learnt from casual conversation that the big saw-mill in the quarter of the town known as Moab would shortly open for the summer. There was manual work for him in plenty if he wanted it. He had in periods of dire necessity already wielded pick and shovel, but had found the experience wholly devoid of charm.

It seemed to him there must be something much easier and more profitable for a man with his wits about him to do in a boom town. His walk took him past a little frame box on Water Street. White lettering on the window announced the place of business of H. C. Curtis, Real Estate, Loans, Insurance.

An erect man, tall and full-bodied, in a neat grey suit, stood in the open doorway, picking his teeth and gazing thoughtfully at the beautiful river. His features were well modelled, dignified and handsome, but his

blue eyes were slightly bleared and underhung with large pouches. His thin hair was neatly parted on either side of a narrow comb of soft fluff running the length of his skull.

"Do you need an assistant, sir?" asked Ming politely, with a winning smile.

Curtis frowned heavily. "Now what in hell, young fellow?" he demanded in a surly tone, "made you think I looked like a man who wanted assistance? How much assistance do you think I need in picking my teeth and watching the river go by?"

"No particular harm in asking, is there?" returned Ming with a twinkle in his eye.

"Are you one of these cheerful nitwits?" countered Curtis, "or did it ever occur to you that life is a flop?"

"I had some such suspicion when I was sitting on the beach at Tahiti one day with nothing in the world but a pair of slacks, and those needing patching."

"Come in and talk," invited Curtis, moving aside. "You mayn't have much sense, but you ain't a complete damn fool. It's all the damn fools I meet up with that convince me that life is a bust—that and women."

They sat down. Curtis put his feet on the desk and offered cigarettes.

"I feel low this morning," he said. "I always do in the mornings, because then I see things as they are; and when a man sees things as they are he either has to go crazy or get drunk. I make it a rule never to get drunk before noon. Where are you from?"

"England originally."

"Originally, eh? Boston with me. Know Boston?"

"No, my first voyage was Liverpool to Galveston

before the mast. My latest was Yokohama-'Frisco. That's all I ever saw of America."

"Sailor?"

"No, just knocking about the world. Up-country in Queensland two years—back blocks. Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, eight months, looking for gold. Didn't get any. Jo'burg, South Africa, a bit over a year. Argentine for a bit, and over the Andes to Valparaiso. Messed about the South Seas after that; copra and bêche-de-mer, you know—little wooden windjammers. Then the China Seas. I'd been east and west and south, so I thought I'd go north for a change, and here I am."

"Like it?"

"Don't know yet. Interested—a bit different from anything I've seen so far."

"H'm. Well, I know Canada, the States and Mexico pretty well, but that lets me out. Know any foreign languages?"

"Oh, I can swear in Spanish and talk pidgin, what the Kanakas talk in the South Seas. A little Australian and South African slang, and a few words of the taal—Boer Dutch, you know. I'll pick up Canadian quickly enough, it's quite a bit like English. If a man knows English he can go just about anywhere on earth, any port of call for sailormen anyhow."

"And now you're looking for a job?"

"Now I'm looking for a job," admitted Ming.

"Don't want to work too hard for your living, eh?"

"No harder than I must."

"That's right, only fools work. You almost show signs of having a mind, so I'll tell you something. There's a boom coming in this burg. I know it, though just now

I don't believe in it. I've made a lifelong study of booms, been in every boom since '86, and made money out of 'em all. You don't believe that?"

"Just what kind of a lie would you like me to tell?" queried Ming with an impassive face.

A grim twinkle lit the American's sombre eyes.

"None, my son. And I'm telling you the truth, too. I always do make money in a boom, and I always pull out just before she busts. But I lose it all on the stock market and the ponies. I've only got sense on one side; I'm a genius on booms, but on the ticker I'm as big a damn fool as the next man. I know that in the mornings when I'm sober, but I place my bets in the afternoon when I ain't."

"When's this boom going to start?" asked Ming.

"Damned if I know, it's hanging fire. Somebody always has to start a boom. I'm no good because I know too much about 'em: a boom always busts in the end, invariably. It needs a nut who believes he's got the New Jerusalem under his feet to start a boom. He convinces the other nuts, and they all commence running around in circles, whooping. I have a sub-division graft to work on the suckers when they get ready to bite—bought the land cheap last year—but it's no use springing it yet."

"What's a sub-division?"

"It's a bit of waste land outside the town surveyed up into lots and blocks. You buy it by the acre from a hick and sell it to fools by the foot. It's a noble graft when it's worked right."

"It sounds interesting. I think you'd better let me tackle it," said Ming with a grin.

Curtis shook his head. "I'm too sober just now to give you the job. I can't believe in anything. Come and have a drink and we'll talk it over."

They entered the bar of the St. Joseph's.

"They handle a slightly less poisonous line of bug juice in here," explained Curtis. "The lumberjacks like their whisky made out of copper filings and sulphuric acid, so this place is less liable to be wrecked by them: a man can only get drunk here, not raving crazy. Here's where most of the real estate pirates in town hang out—they're a hungry bunch just now."

There were only three men in the bar: a tall young man with an extraordinarily massive jaw, and eyes almost hidden under a projecting orbital ridge; an elderly man in shabby clothes, with a broken nose and a wispy white beard; and a squat, paunchy man with a crimson face and a moustache like a cat's whiskers."

"Hello, Hank, come to shake your mornin' grouch?" shouted the last in a hoarse voice.

"Things look pretty blue this mornin', eh? He-he-he," giggled the white-bearded man. "A little fire-water is my prescription."

The tall young man merely grinned, his eyes disappeared, and his enormous jaw became two-thirds of his face.

"Mornin', fellow coyotes," growled Curtis. "And shut up."

The bar-tender slid forward a bottle and glasses.

"What do you drink?" inquired Curtis of Ming.

"Anything at all: rum, whisky, brandy, saki, arrack or square-face."

It was true and not true. A wanderer in the world's ports of call will have a lonely time if he does not drink, and Ming was a sociable being. But he had early discovered that he had no taste and no head for liquor, and use did not seem to reconcile him to it. He had, however, large hands and supple fingers, which enabled him to palm a glass and practice sleight-of-hand. He had established for himself in various places an enviable reputation for a strong head.

In grim silence Curtis filled and tossed off three glasses of raw whisky in succession. Ming apparently drank even with him: actually, he took three sips from his original drink.

"Well, are you lubricated up yet?" inquired the red-faced man.

A bland smile slowly overspread Curtis' face. "Well, Huck, I do begin to feel that the world has recently taken a slight turn for the better. Let me make you acquainted with Mr. Ming here, a crackerjack real estate salesman. He's the man who's going to make things hum around this dead burg. Mr. Ming, meet Mr. Huckaby Borowdell. The gentleman in the whiskers is Dr. Jimmy Pope, and the man with the iron jaw is Mr. G. G. Kenkenake, generally known as Kicky."

Ming shook hands all round.

"And you think prospects are good in Gateway, do you, Mr. Ming?" inquired the decayed doctor with his irritating giggle.

Ming picked up his cue at once. "I believe so," he replied impressively. "This town's beginning to get known. Why, I heard about it down in 'Frisco. Of course, I'm only looking the situation over, but from what

I've seen I think all the place needs is a little waking up."

Borowdell slapped him enthusiastically on the back. "By gosh, you're the man we want!" he bellowed. "She sure does need wakin' up, the dern dump has been asleep so long you can't make any of the old moss-backs see that times have changed. They have the town flat on its back an' nailed down, they ain't progressive."

"That's so," drawled Kenkenake, "you just can't do business with 'em at all. They'll trade flour for mushrat pelts, or bum a drink on you, but that lets 'em out. I'd like to know how in hell a man could get 'em goin'."

"What we need is a man with an idee," said the doctor. "New blood, he-he-he. This town is sufferin' from senility, locomotor ataxia an' general paresis; it simply can't get goin'."

In chorus they told him of the possibilities of Gateway as a boom centre, and the blindness and disgraceful apathy of the citizenry.

"Gentlemen," said Ming, beginning to quiver with excitement, "will you leave this to me? Will you help me to make it go if I can think up some good rag?"

"Go to it," bawled Borowdell, "we'll be into it with you over the shoe-laces."

"Give me a little time, gentlemen. Shall we go back to the office, Curtis? I'd like to retire into seclusion and cogitate ways and means."

"Well, I think my works are pretty well greased," said Curtis doubtfully. "I usually need four drinks. . . ."

Ming put a forceful hand on his elbow and steered him out of the bar.

"Not now, old man—later. We need a clear head for this. I want the benefit of your deep wisdom and experience."

On their way back Curtis gave his opinion of the three they had just met.

"Borowdell's smart, he's good-hearted, but I wouldn't trust him too far. Doc would be making ten thousand a year to-day if he'd keep sober—ruined a fine practice in Cincinnati. Kicky's a good lad, fine talker when he's wound up, but he don't have enough faith in himself—drinks to give himself courage. They all need somebody to start 'em. I guess I do too."

"Well, I love a good rag," said Ming. "Most of all, dearly beloved, when there's money in it. I would chortle if I could stand this village on its head and shake a few shekels out of its pockets. But I need time to think up something juicy. You don't mind taking me round and showing me the estate and so on? You know, the what-you-call-it?"

"The sub-division?"

"Aha, the sub-division. Sweet word—good Canadianese, or is it American? Location is another Canadian word I've just learnt—and proposition. Oh, I'm picking the language up fast. But I can't spit like a Canadian yet. What a range, what accuracy."

"Come and have lunch with me, and I'll take you up and show you Lakeview Heights," said Curtis.

"Am I an employee of yours, Mr. Curtis?"

The American turned upon him a face in which benignity struggled with scepticism.

"No, damn you, you ain't. You should have let me take my fourth drink, then I'd have taken you in as a partner. I'm still too cold sober. How do I know you're not just another windjammer? You have to show me. But come and eat anyway."

They had lunch at Li Wong's. Li was a Chinese gentleman of irreproachable manners and the most unimpeachable integrity, and he kept the only good restaurant in Gateway.

"This is Mr. Ming," said Curtis. "He knows good food and so I brought him here."

Li bowed with a bland smile. "Thank you, Mr. Curtis," he said with scarcely an accent. "The cook has some fresh lake trout he has been saving for gentlemen who can taste things."

They were served at a spotless table by a deft, silent and smiling Chinese, and ate fillets from a forty-pound northern lake trout, a fish possessing a refined delicacy of flavour that is worth travelling many miles for. They expressed their grateful acknowledgments to Li, who received them with the charming courtesy of his race.

At the office Curtis transacted some small business, and then announced his intention of returning to the St. Jo's for his fourth drink. Ming went with him reluctantly: there seemed to be no job in sight yet, and he could not afford to stand many drinks. He was introduced to many men in the now well-filled bar.

Curtis mellowed visibly as the drinks flowed down his throat. He smiled; honey instead of wormwood dripped from his tongue.

"Mr. Ming, shall we go out now and look that subdivision over?"

"Decidedly, Mr. Curtis."

The American owned one of the couple of dozen cars as yet in the town. It had two seats and a buggy top, was very high off the ground, and had a four-cylinder engine. It panted heavily going up the steep hill past the jail, but arrived safely at the top.

"Wonderful hill climber," said Curtis with pride.

Ming surveyed the level plateau they had reached. There were scattered buildings in sight, and even some embryo streets, but in a very short time they were following a winding trail through poplar woods and willow thickets.

Curtis turned off on a pair of shallow parallel ruts, squashed over some boggy land, and ascended a low ridge. Below lay a broad shallow valley, the bed of which was occupied by a reedy swamp. A number of wild ducks and moorhens rested peacefully on the water, a little cloud of grey and white terns swooped and screamed, and muskrats sat upon their domed mounds of reeds. There was not a building in sight, but a herd of scrub cattle grazed on the other side of the slough.

"Lakeview Heights," announced Curtis, "Gateway's exclusive residential district. Refined homes—nobody can be refined enough to live here unless he has the price. What do you think of it, Mr. Ming?"

"Well, you have a lake—of sorts—and I suppose this is the height from which you view it. Pretty pastoral and all that—but what's that stink?"

"That's the slough; it's got no outlet and the water's pretty stagnant. The wind's blowing from the wrong direction to-day. Most days you wouldn't notice it."

"But will anybody buy land as far from town as this?" asked Ming incredulously.

Curtis laughed. "They will. You wouldn't believe anybody could be that foolish, but they are. Once start 'em buying and they'll buy anything, anywhere. That's boom fever; some kind of a bug seems to go around and bite the whole community, and they all go nutty together. The only trouble is to start the bug biting."

Ming's impetuous nose twitched, and he rubbed his hands together gleefully.

"If I'm not bug-starter in ordinary to the town of Gateway, call me one myself. What a rag! Let's go back, I want to see a map of this town. I begin to have ideas—dim previsions of ultimate verities, you know, when everything will be gas and gaiters."

Curtis drove him all over the town, from the west end, where the federal penitentiary squatted grimly behind its high wall, to the soaring smoke-stack and domed sawdust burner of the big saw-mill in Moab. The town would soon cease to be a lumbering centre, for the timber limits were nearly exhausted; on the other hand, settlers were pouring into the country about to be opened up by the railway across the Sweetwater. There was every cause for optimism, and the optimism of the West is a heady brew. As Curtis said, it needed but one enthusiast to precipitate that wild orgy of gambling known as a boom.

"I'm getting dry again," he complained presently. "Need something for my complaint right away."

In the St. Jo's the sane and sceptical views of the morning were fast being submerged in a rising tide of alcohol.

Huck Borowdell, noisier and hoarser, held forth on Gateway's coming greatness. Kicky Kenkenake, in a

more cheerful and self-reliant mood, supported his partner. Then there were Oppenshaw and Rates and Little Willie Bee and Ham Wofflin and Oakes and Whittaker and twenty more, all talking at once.

Few of them seemed to have any definite profession or means of support. Almost without exception they were adventurers of the cheaper type, part of that curious collection of flotsam always to be found eddying about the out-ports of the world: straws whirled to the periphery by the centrifugal force of civilization.

Ming listened, poked his trenchant nose into one group after another, cracked his whimsical jokes, and juggled the drinks rained upon him, so that they went anywhere but into his system. It was not hard in that atmosphere to drink out of an empty glass hidden in his palm, or to tilt back the bottle before the glass was full, or to spill a drink unseen into some tall brass spittoon.

Curtis passed his peak and began to descend. He was still a gentleman from Boston, but sadly run to seed. He passed from geniality to hilarity, from hilarity to maudlin affection. Ming rescued him at last, weeping out his sorrows on the shoulder of Huck Borowdell, who wept unrestrainedly too, and took him home.

"You're my friend," he said emotionally. "Only true friend I have in the world. Make you my partner—Curtis & Ming—put Gateway on map. Make millions—biggest city in America—finest—scho—shcu—pendush. . . ."

Ming left him at his door. His own legs were still steady, but something seemed to be gyrating wildly in his head.

"If you don't roll along home and turn in," he admonished himself, "you'll be squiffy. Just one more

drink would turn the trick. Marmaduke Cuthbert, walk the straight and narrow."

He was the last man in. Mrs. Midger gave him a keen and suspicious look, and then smiled. "I was afraid you'd come home soused."

"So was I," he admitted with a grin. "That's why I came."

She was looking at him invitingly. They were alone. Somehow she had become young and beautiful. He knew it was the rosy mist of intoxication, but he had no control of his emotions. He put an arm about her large waist and kissed her.

She giggled softly, pushed him away, and put up a warning finger. "Sssh, he's in there," she whispered with a jerk of her head. "He's jealous of you."

"Now, why the devil did I do that?" he asked himself, as he heavily climbed the stairs.

Kroge rolled over as the light was switched on and gave him a sour look.

"I hate bunkin' in with a man what's pickled," he grumbled.

"So do I, beloved of my heart, that's why I always go to bed sober," returned Ming cheerfully.

Kroge grunted and turned his back.

Ming was strongly disinclined to get up for breakfast, but the knowledge that he would be alone in the house with his polyandrous landlady brought him out of bed with a groan.

At table Springer regarded him with malevolence, but Mrs. Midger's bold blue eyes held a possessive look that made him shudder inwardly. He seized his hat and escaped.

"I'm not a candidate for that succession," he said emphatically to himself. "I'll have to look about for another diggings."

It was Western weather at its finest. The peculiar clarity of the air heightened the dome of the sky where a few small clouds were laboriously climbing the vast vault; the sun was brilliant, but not burning; new leaves almost visibly expanded under his rays; robins, meadow larks and song sparrows were fluting and whistling everywhere.

Ming was affected. There is something touching about summer in the Canadian West; it is so short and so lovely. It breaks with such an effort from its winter prison, and is so soon overtaken and slain by the frost. It does not slowly wax and wane, but is born lusty and vigorous, frolics through its days like a child that has not long to live, and is struck down in full career by the north wind. Ming seated himself on a granite boulder by the river, and watched the emerald water dancing in the sun.

But he had little time for poetic contemplation; he must have a suggestion for Curtis. He dropped his chin in his hand and pondered, letting his eyes idly follow a great blue heron fishing with a divine dignity in the shallows.

At last he rose abruptly and walked along Water Street with a shining face and a light in his eye. Curtis had not yet arrived at his office, and it was not until nearly ten that he appeared.

His face was puffy and his eyes looked sick. "What in hell are you grinning at?" was his acrid greeting.

"Not feeling very chipper this morning, what?"

"I feel like the devil. You took me out and made me full as a tick, and now you come around to jeer at me."

"You wrong me, dear heart. I come before you with a scrumptious idea, and feeling full of beans and benevolence in consequence. I think I know how to start your baby boom to boombing."

"You couldn't start anything in this dead doghole of a town," snarled Curtis. "This damned country is only fit for Indians; we made a bad mistake when we took it away from 'em. Gad, I've got an awful head on me, haven't been so bad for a long while. How did you get away with it?"

"Oh, I don't know, I didn't have much to drink," answered Ming with literal truth.

"I'd give five dollars for a head like yours—must be solid bone. I've got a brain, and too much liquor plays the devil with it."

"Dearly beloved," said Ming tenderly, "you must take some medicine for that head, six fingers of hot rum in a washbasin would be about right. Come on, you won't be fit for association with the human race until you do."

"Damn the human race, the most pitiful vermin in existence."

At the St. Jo's they found Borowdell, Kenkenake, Oppenshaw and Little Willie Bee, all of them looking somewhat the worse for wear. They greeted Ming warmly.

"Any man who can tote his liquor like that is a friend of mine," declared Borowdell. "What's your first name?"

Ming made a wry face, his baptismal name had been a burden to him all his life.

"They called me Marmaduke when I was too young to know what they were doing to me."

"Marmaduke," repeated the grinning Borowdell. "Aw, hell."

"Duke's his name," put in Little Willie. "And, begad, we'll make him Duke of Gateway."

Little Willie looked like a skinned monkey, his face was raw and puckered and hairless. One could not guess his age. He had a nimble mind and nimble fingers, it was not wise to play cards with him.

"Duke of Gateway it is," agreed Borowdell readily. "And what's the news for us this fine mornin', Duke?"

"I have a rather juicy idea," said Ming slowly, "but I need wise guidance with it."

"Let me in on it," said Oppenshaw, a burly man with thick lips and cunning little grey eyes. "I ain't seen an idea or anybody with such a thing since I struck this burg."

"I'll speak for Ben an' Little Willie," said Borowdell. "You wouldn't think it to look at 'em, but you can trust either one near as far as you can see 'em."

"Well, if you're going to be so beastly frank about it," said Ming, "how many of you can keep your mouths shut when you're drunk?"

"None of us," admitted Borowdell. "But we can stay sober if there's anything doin'. We just drink for idleness, and you were the man started us off on that bat last night. We set out to get you drunk, an' be damned if you weren't the only sober man in the crowd at the finish."

"I suspected some little thing like that, dearly beloved," grinned Ming, "and that's why I slipped away so early."

"Did you slip away?" asked Oppenshaw. "You were still there the last I remember, two of you."

"Well, come along to Curtis' office and we'll talk it over," said Ming. "Your permission, sir?"

"But I must have my fourth drink first," insisted Curtis. "You docked me yesterday and that's what started me on the toboggan."

In the cramped office Curtis and Borowdell occupied the two chairs, Oppenshaw, Kenkenake and Little Willie perched on the counter, and Ming mounted the narrow ledge on the roll-top desk.

"Did it ever occur to any of you to buy?" he inquired.

"Hell! our business is sellin'," objected Borowdell.

"Precisely, and you're trying to sell more land to men who've already got more than they know what to do with. Why not ask them to sell? Soften their flinty hearts with the prospect of lucre."

"Who's got any?" demanded Oppenshaw. "Show me the man. If I stay in this dead town much longer I'll be in the bread line."

"Me too," said Kenkenake gloomily.

"I'd be there now if there was a bread line," growled Curtis. "You're talking like a fool."

"The North Western Railway is coming into this town, isn't it?" asked Ming.

"That's what they say," growled Kenkenake, "but I don't believe it."

"And who in hell knows when and where?" grumbled Curtis.

"My friends," suggested Ming, "do you imagine that an attitude of sustained gloom and blighted pessimism is going to assist the tender boom flower to blossom? You're not crape-bound undertakers at a funeral. You should be light, you should be buoyant, you should sing little songs of joy and skip like lambs."

"Well, you're some hot air artist," commented Borowdell with admiration.

"I seek to shed a little sunshine on the drooping boom flower, you're drowning the thing with salt tears. Let me whisper good tidings in your ears: the N.W.R. is coming in here, and perhaps I have an idea where. I propose that we should go out and inquire from the chaps who own property along the right of way what they want for their holdings."

"What do you know about the N.W.R.?" demanded Oppenshaw.

"Officially nothing. Perhaps it's merely my imagination. Perhaps . . ." He left the sentence unfinished.

Little Willie flashed a glance at Oppenshaw and a look passed from Borowdell to Kenkenake. Curtis straightened his back. There was suddenly a tenseness among them all as among a pack of wolves who have just winded a deer.

In a moment they were in full cry, all baying questions at him. He would answer none of them, but brought out the map and showed them that there were only two ways in which a railway could enter Gateway, lying as it did on its narrow bench between the river and the hill.

"Never mind what I actually know," he said, "that'll all come out in the washing. But I'm going to tackle

this chap Acland about his Ninth Avenue property. Oppenshaw and Little Willie had better see Knowland and Gates and Pootle about the west end, and Kicky and Borowdell can concentrate on the men who own land near Maple Avenue and along Broadway. Then we'll all meet to-morrow afternoon and report progress. And remember : no gloom, no doubt, the happy laugh, the cheerful smile, golden visions of progress, and all that sort of thing."

CHAPTER III

"WHAT's that bird tryin' to put over?" demanded Little Willie of his partner when they reached the street.

"Either he's a big bluff or he knows a lot more than he's tellin'," said Oppenshaw. "Wish I knew which. But if he thinks he's puttin' anything over on me he's out of luck. We'll go an' see those guys, but anything we get's ours, eh? He may be pretty slick, but we're watchin' him."

"You're damn right, we're watchin' him," agreed Little Willie, and puckered his monkey face into an expression of extreme cunning.

"Do you think he's on the level, Kicky?" Borowdell was asking Kenkenake at the same moment.

"Can't make him out, Huck," answered Kenkenake with a shake of the head. "Where'd he come from? Is he on the inside? What's his graft? He certainly seems to know a lot about the N.W.R."

"He'll bear watchin', Kicky, that's what I think, an' we want to be right there to get ours if anything breaks."

"I figure to be. I suppose there's no harm seein' what there is to pick up along Broadway. We might be able to handle a little stuff ourselves, an' there's nothing like gettin' on the band wagon before the procession starts."

In the office, Curtis leaned back in his chair and fixed a sombre gaze upon Ming, perched grinning atop the desk.

"Now, young fellow, what's all this about? What do you know about the N.W.R.?"

"Not a thing, old man, not a solitary. But, you know, before you can get anything done in a thing like this you must get men running about in circles and asking questions. Tell a man you have something to sell him and he either biffs you in the eye or slams the door in your face. I tried to sell thing-um-bobs once from house to house when I was hard up. Perfect nightmare. Ever try it?"

"I've peddled a heap of things in my time," nodded Curtis.

"Well, you know, give a man the idea that if he doesn't take the thing somebody's going to jump in and snatch it, and he'll give you his shirt for it. Can do, eh?"

"Something in that all right."

"Absobloodylutely. Get all these blighters asking each other questions, and they'll discover a flock of mares' nests—rumours flying in all directions. Something's bound to happen. The N.W.R. is just bait, but any bait'll do with some fish if it's shiny enough. Now I'll toddle along and talk to this Acland perisher. Ta-ta."

Mr. Duncan Acland was a tall man of fifty odd, with a long and narrow face of a peculiar grey-blue colour. His dark eyebrows met high over the root of his nose and sloped away to the outer corners of his eyes, which lay in ambush between swollen and wrinkled lids. His nose was pointed, his long upper lip was pointed, and

there was a little cleft in his pointed chin. On his long neck there were small growths like a turkey's wattles.

He had been in business in Gateway for many years, previous to which he had sold liquor to Indians. Money that came into his hands remained in his hands. He was rich, but anxious to be much richer. He greeted Ming with a hostile and suspicious stare when that smiling young man invaded his store.

"Can I have a few minutes' private conversation with you, Mr. Acland?"

"If you came in here to sell me something, young man, you can walk right out again. I don't know you."

"I'm not selling anything, Mr. Acland, but I'd like to know what you're holding your Ninth Avenue property at."

"Who wants to know? Want to buy it?"

"I can't tell you that, Mr. Acland. I merely want to know if it's for sale and what you want for it."

The merchant quivered with greed and curiosity and suspicion. He wrinkled his long nose and thrust out his pointed upper lip. His voice was like a creaking door.

"Are you one of these here real estate sharks?"

"I'm interested in real estate, Mr. Acland. Just at present I'm very interested in Ninth Avenue real estate, and you're a large owner in that vicinity, I understand."

"You tell me this, young feller: are you workin' for the N.W.R., or ain't you?"

"Afraid I can't answer your question, Mr. Acland, I'm looking over certain properties for possible purchasers; that's all."

"I got to know more than that," insisted Acland, in a fever lest he lose an opportunity for profit. "If there's anything comin' to me out of that property, I want all of it, see. I ain't dividin' up with nobody. I ain't in business for my health, nor for your health neither."

"Well, I'm afraid I'll have to call on the other property-owners along Ninth Avenue," said Ming quietly, turning to go.

"Here, hold on, don't be so hasty, young man; I didn't tell you the property wasn't for sale. Come in my office an' we'll talk this over."

Blandly smiling, Ming followed him, and in the dusty little cubby hole behind the store encountered a curiosity passing that of women. He was subjected to a cross-examination such as only the husbands of jealous wives know.

"I don't know, I don't know, I don't know," gibbered the old man, fairly wringing his hands. "You won't answer none of my questions. You may be a crook for all I know, I never saw you before."

"You must admit, at least, Mr. Acland, that I've made no attempt to get money out of you."

"You never know these days; I had a man rob me three years ago. He got twenty dollars of my good money, and him a stranger just like you. There's a heap more in this than you let on. I don't figure to get stung again, no, I sure don't."

"Well, I'll go along and see the others, and drop in again in a few days, eh?"

The merchant clawed his face with both hands; fear that he was losing a chance to make money driving him almost out of his mind,

"Now, don't you go around usin' my name, young feller," he warned. "I don't know you, I never seen you before, an' if you're runnin' any crooked game, don't look to me."

"Mr. Acland, I object very strongly to your insinuations of dishonesty. I've asked you a civil question, and I've had nothing but incivility in return. I can get what I want elsewhere."

"No, no, no, hold your horses, young man. No call to fly off the handle. You come in an' see me first, and if you're on the square you'll find me square with you. I'll make you a good price: them other fellers'll gyp you sure, you can't trust nobody these days. You come in an' see day after to-morrow, an' I'll tell you what I'll do."

Ming walked away chuckling. "Well, there's one man in this town in an excited state anyhow. Phew, how he could ask questions; by Jove! if I'd known anything he'd have wormed it out of me. Where ignorance is bliss. . . . Wonder how my partners in crime are getting on. Shall I hunt 'em up? No, by golly, I'll lie doggo, and let them do the wondering. What a rag. I'll stand this unlovely village on its deboshed head."

It was too late for dinner at Mrs. Midger's, so he dropped in at Li Wong's for lunch, and later crossed the bridge and strolled among the fragrant, murmuring pines until it was time to go home to supper.

Here he encountered more burning curiosity. They wished to know what he was doing in town and what he intended to work at.

He smiled at them, that friendly but baffling smile which had made smooth many rough places in his

life, and replied that he was merely looking the place over. He might settle down in Gateway, or he might move on.

After supper, still carefully avoiding the bars, he went for a walk in one of the directions from which the N.W.R. must enter the city if it came at all. There were others doing the same thing, and he thought he recognized the lanky Kenkenake in the distance. He evaded these little groups, but contrived that he should be seen standing conspicuously on a knoll apparently taking notes.

Somewhat fatigued, he returned to his boarding-house, slipped in without Mrs. Midger's knowledge and went to bed.

He found a little crowd outside the office in the morning, and an excited discussion in progress.

A short fat man bounced on the sidewalk before him, vociferating, "What's all this about the N.W.R.? What's it all about, I want to know?"

"Nothing official to give out," chuckled Ming, and elbowed his way into the office.

The place was thick and stifling with tobacco smoke, and Curtis sat glumly in a corner while excited men fired questions at him from all sides.

"Here he comes now," was the cry. "Now give us the low down on all this. When's the N.W.R. comin' in? Where's she goin' to run? Who you actin' for, anyway?"

"Move over, old horse," said Ming to Oppenshaw, and hoisted himself to a seat on the counter. "Now, little playmates, what's upsetting you all?"

"What about the N.W.R.?" was the unanimous howl.

"The good old N.W.R., little ones, may decide to come to town, and if it does it will need rails to run on, and a place to build a station, and all that kind of thing. Won't it now? Yes, yes."

"Aw, cut out the comedy an' give us the straight of it."

Ming shook his head with an impish grin. "Have I asked any of you chaps to reveal the inmost secret of your lives? Does a wise man tell all he knows? Why should I take the whole world into my confidence? Why, indeed?"

"I don't believe he knows a damn thing," grumbled a disgusted voice.

"An observation worth pondering, my friends," remarked the unmoved Ming. "I haven't said that I knew anything. I happen to be interested for reasons of my own in the N.W.R.—so are a great many other people. It's not a disinterested interest—there may be filthy lucre in it for me. I hope so."

"Well, tell us the rest."

Ming dropped his bantering tone. "Gentlemen, I'm here on private business of my own. I'm going quietly about that business, but naturally it is to a certain extent confidential: you can't do business at the top of your voice, you know. I'm sorry, but just now I haven't anything to give out. Later on perhaps. I believe Gateway has a great future before it, and I intend to do what I can to promote that future, and, incidentally, to make a profit out of it. But you must pardon me if I'm not at liberty to tell you anything more at present."

"Aw, don't be a hog; you don't need it all," protested a man.

Curtis suddenly stood up. "What is this?" he demanded stridently, "a dog fight?" He turned on one of the noisiest talkers. "Have you got any business for me? If you ain't, I got business of my own uptown."

He drove them before him into the street and locked the office door behind him. They merely formed in procession and followed him and Ming to the St. Jo's, where they filled the bar to overflowing.

Ming found himself the centre of an eagerly hospitable group, who scarcely concealed their intention of making him drunk, and getting him to talk. He baffled them by passing rapidly up and down the room with a full glass in his hand.

"Thanks, but I have one here at the moment," he would reply to offers. "Give me time to drink it, old man, and I'll have one of you next."

The bar was not well lit, and at intervals he contrived to spill his glass unobserved into one of the many spittoons. He would refill it in the sight of all, sip it, and move away. By noon he and the bartender were the only sober men in the place.

"That long-nosed Englishman has had ninety-nine jolts of hooch already," grumbled Borowdell to Ham Wofflin. "I've had six, and I dassent touch another before dinner, or I'm sunk. He's a blasted tank, that's what he is. Look at him—ain't turned a hair."

Hamilton Wofflin steadied himself against the wall. He was just under seven feet in height, a vast, shambling, loose-jointed, splay-footed creature, with a huge shaggy head swaying on a weak neck.

"He can't drink," he replied in a voice as big as his body. "I just had sheventeen an' look at me. I ain't drunk, an' I had nineteen already."

"Yes, yes," said Borowdell hastily, for the giant was truculent when drunk.

"You don't believe me," said Wofflin reproachfully. "I can shее it in your eye. An' I won't have any mansh call me a liar. Take that."

He drew back a ponderous fist. Borowdell ducked quickly, and Wofflin hit the wall a terrific blow. Then he fell full length upon the floor.

"Halp, halp," he roared, "he's murderin' me."

Oppenshaw was engaged in a violent argument with a little man called Minden. The uproar was growing every minute.

Ming hooked his arm in Curtis'. "This bally place is turning into a bear garden. Stand me a lunch, old chap, and I'll let you into the true inwardness of things."

They wormed their way out, despite loud protests, and found a box at Li Wong's. Curtis had drunk himself into a good mood, and ordered lavishly.

"You've earned it, boy," he said. "I don't know what you did, but you've started the boom. I know the signs: all these damn fools will start selling lots back and forth now for ten times what they're worth. Yes, fifty times, if the boom lasts long enough. Now's our chance to pick up some easy money. I'll put my sub-division on the market."

"The prospect brings no tears to my eyes," said Ming. "I'm down to eighty cents."

"You don't say. I'll need somebody to help put Lakeview Heights over, so here's an advance on your

salary." He brought out a roll of bills and regarded them ruefully. "Getting pretty slim, this wad, pretty slim. But I can spare you fifteen; you ought to pick up plenty in commissions if you hustle."

"Saved," ejaculated Ming. "I had a horrible fear I'd have to go to work soon."

"I'll have to cut down on the booze," said Curtis. "I always drink too much when business is on the bum. Come on to the office, there's liable to be something doing there this afternoon."

"Lead on, MacDuff, or is it MacBeth?" said Ming. "Who the deuce cares? Up Guards and at 'em."

"You watch and listen," advised Curtis. "It won't take you long to catch on; sucker fishing is easy once they start to bite."

All afternoon the office was filled with men, all more or less intoxicated with whisky or boom fever, or both. They talked a jargon unintelligible as yet to Ming, of lots, blocks, plans, footage, acreage, trackage, titles, commissions, quit claims, caveats, stand-offs and equities.

Ray Linqut, a red-headed man with a hare-lip, came charging in. "Where's this man Duke? Oh, here. Well, listen, I got a proposition for you: here's your pick of Blocks, 7, 8, and 11, Plan H4. See, right here on the map."

Curtis shook his head. "Too far out, Ray; we might look at something closer in."

Linqut grimaced horribly, showing eye-teeth like a wolf's. "But the N.W.R.'s goin' right through there. It's only a block from Ninth. Here, look, here's old Acland's stuff that you were after yesterday."

"Can't touch it just now, old man," said Ming gravely, fingering the fifteen dollars in his pocket. "I'm rather tied up at the moment. Let you know later.

"It'll be gone by then," warned Linquit. "You'll be sorry. Well, I can't wait." He dashed out.

Borowdell lumbered in, the sweat standing in beads all over his crimson face. "Here's a buy," he puffed. "Biggest snap in town. Forty-two feet, lots 12 and 13, Block R, Plan B1, right on Maple, corner of Eighth. Option of buying northerly nine feet of 13 and all 14 if you want it. Only forty dollars a front foot, six hundred down, and three, six and nine months on the balance."

"I'll take you," said Curtis promptly. "No options. Can you give clear title?"

"Yes, I've searched title. And I have exclusive listin' on it from P. P. Mawrer."

"It's a deal. Mind the office, will you, Duke, while I go and fix this up."

Ming remained, listening intently to the talk that eddied about him, but saying little himself. Men dashed in, asked for Curtis, and rushed out again. Men offered him pieces of property, each of which, they solemnly assured him, was the buy of a lifetime. Men gathered in groups before the big map on the wall, and argued at the top of their voices, and took flight into the street again like a flock of sparrows. Everybody shouted; the louder noise a man was able to make the better pleased he seemed with himself.

Curtis was away a couple of hours, and came in beaming, though perfectly sober. Ming was alone in the office at the moment.

"The old boom's travelling," he chuckled. "I turned that stuff over and made two hundred and fifty."

"Explain, dearly beloved," begged Ming. "Me no savvy."

"Well, I bought the stuff off Borowdell, paid him his six hundred bucks, and went on down the street until I struck young McHarg. I offered it to him at sixty dollars a foot and he grabbed at it. I signed a quit claim deed and he gave me his cheque for eight hundred and fifty. Two hundred and fifty clear profit for me."

"Ye gods," said Ming with bulging eyes. "But what'll he do with it? If he can't make the rest of the payments won't they call on you for them? He's the flat-headed youth with the silly laugh, isn't he?"

"That's the man. He ain't such a fool as he looks; he'll sell it again for seventy, maybe eighty dollars a foot. And the fellow he sells to will try and unload on somebody else. Finally it'll get into the hands of some poor boob who'll be left holding the bag. I'll be out of here before then, and they couldn't do anything to me anyway."

"And what then?"

"Oh, it'll go back to the original owner if it ain't sold for taxes, but I should worry about that. All you've got to do in this business is turn the stuff over. Don't hang on a minute longer than you have to. Nobody ever figures to make a second payment. What the devil do you care who owns the land, as long as you get yours out of the first payment, see?"

"Some sort of illumination dawns upon my feeble mind. But what happens to all this business in the end?"

"The boom busts, that's all. Every time. What you want to do is stand from under when she comes down. Don't hang on: the last man in loses out. The one thing you have to watch is to unload before she blows up. Get out with your profits. Damn few ever do, but I always have so far."

"Proceed, dear heart. I acquire wisdom in chunks."

"The other main thing you have to watch is not to take any bum cheques. There'll be a flock of n.s.f. cheques floating around in a little while."

"What's that?"

"A kite, not sufficient funds. Don't sign any papers or pay out any money yourself, until you have the cheque marked at the bank."

"But isn't it a crime to issue stumers? It is in England."

"This ain't England, and everybody in town who isn't damn careful will have a bushel of n.s.f.'s on his hands inside a year. You'll probably kite a few yourself. But you'll get onto all this in a little while. Here's another yap comin'; it's Kicky."

Kenkenake came in. His ponderous jaw stuck out at a truly terrifying angle, and there was a bright light in his usually sombre eyes.

"She's boomin'," he announced. "She's broken at last. I sold six hundred foot of trackage on Sixth Avenue West to Windjammer Whittaker for eleven hundred smackers. Nice little commission."

"But there's no track there," said Ming.

"Didn't you tell me yesterday the N.W.R. were going through right on Sixth?" demanded Kenkenake.

"Be damned if I did. I don't know where it's going."

Kenkenake stared. "Somebody told me." He began to laugh. "Well, who the hell cares anyway? I told Windjammer I got it straight the road was goin' through there, and he bit. The N.W.R. can go where she damn pleases for all me, and he can turn his property into a cattle ranch if he wants—there's plenty grass there, and no houses."

They repaired to the restaurant of the courtly Li Wong, who was doing a roaring trade. The place was full of boomsters, all talking at once.

"This little burg has certainly waked up," said Curtis. "I knew it was coming, but somebody had to start it. No, I won't go to the St. Jo's to-night: fellow can't waste time drinking when things begin to hum. Come on back to the office."

It seemed that the town could not go to bed that night. It was after midnight when Curtis finally arose and drove four or five still vociferating boomsters into the street.

"Aw, get to bed," he advised them. "All day tomorrow not touched yet, and the town'll still be here when you wake up."

Ming sauntered along the deserted street. "There are decided possibilities in me," he reflected. "In three days I succeed almost by my unaided efforts in converting a community of seven thousand odd people into a pack of lunatics, and receive a dukedom. Duke of Gateway—wonder what the old pater'd say to that? Have to write to him. Now, begad, if I could only get hold of a little oof, gelt, cash."

CHAPTER IV

THE boarding-house was in darkness, and he had to hammer on the door for some time. It was opened an inch.

"Are you sober?" inquired Mrs. Midger through the crack in a fretful voice.

"Sober as a judge, Mrs. Midger. Sorry, but I was working very late at the office."

The door opened a little wider. He had a glimpse of the worthy lady shapeless in a pink wrapper with her head a mass of curl-rags.

"I ain't fit to be seen," she explained, closing the door hastily behind him without switching on the light. "This is no time to be comin' home. I don't like my boarders out after eleven: I got to get up early in the morning myself."

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Midger," he apologized abjectly, backing away.

He could hear her shuffling after him in the dark, breathing heavily.

"We'll let it go this time," she said in a mollified voice, "but what you goin' to give me for draggin' me out of bed this time of night? Springer's asleep, don't mind him."

He had a strong sensation of disgust, but he felt that he owed her something for being put to the

inconvenience of letting him in. Moreover, she barred his way to the stairs. He bent hastily, kissed her, and tried to escape. But she put both fat hands on his shoulders, holding him tightly.

"What's your hurry?" she whispered tenderly. "Don't be shy. You can have another if you want."

She pulled his head down. Her full lips were moist and clinging; she made low gurgling noises and pressed close to him. He felt as if he was being smothered in a feather bed. Disengaging himself gently, but very firmly, he fled upstairs.

"Damn it," grumbled Kroge, blinking as the light flashed on, "don't you never go to bed? Some night-hawk you are."

"I'll never disturb you again, my friend," said Ming grimly, pulling his bag out from under the bed and beginning rapidly to pack.

"What's the matter? goin' to beat your board bill?"

"What? Oh, you mean, bilk my landlady. No, I paid for a week in advance when I came, but I've had too, too much of that fair lady downstairs. Can I get out of this window? Yes, the kitchen roof's right under it. Well, toodleloo, old man, good luck. Tell the Midger in the morning that I was suddenly called away on urgent business."

"You're nutty," objected Kroge. "She can't hurt you. Stick around an' you can be star boarder if you want: Springer's about due to get the hook, anyway."

But Ming was already crawling out of the window. Letting his bag down by a string, he slid down the sloping roof of the lean-to kitchen and dropped lightly to the soft ground below. He picked up his bag and ran.

He did not care to seek a hotel for the rest of the night, and so curled up in a haystack behind a nearby house. The night was mild, and the hay soft, warm and fragrant. He woke to find the sun well up and the birds singing.

Lest the owner of the house come out and object to his presence, he went down to the river, stretched himself on the grass in the sun, and enjoyed another nap. Having picked the hay out of his hair and brushed his coat, he went down to the river for a wash and a drink, and dropped in on Li Wong for breakfast.

Curtis was early at the office, wearing an unusually benign expression for such an hour.

"I think the fishing's going to be good to-day," he observed. "If you have any suckers in sight, get 'em on the hook right away; boom business goes in flurries, so get 'em while the getting's good."

"I think I'll go and see old Acland," said Ming, "though I hate going near the old wart."

"Well, if you can get along with him you're the first man who ever could, from what I hear," said Curtis. "But these old tightwads fall the hardest when they do loosen up, and he ought to be good pickings for you."

Ming found Acland in a state of great agitation, walking up and down, rubbing his bony hands together and twisting his hatchet face on its wattled neck.

He made a snuffling noise in greeting. "Mf, mf, mf, back again, eh? Don't know as I want to sell yet. If I hold on, the property 'll go up."

"You don't know," said Ming boldly. "It might come down."

Acland's hanging eyebrows fluttered like wings.
"But the N.W.R. You said the N.W.R. . . ."

"I never said a word about the N.W.R., Mr. Acland. You began to talk about it yourself"

The merchant looked at him in bewilderment and despair, and wrung his hands in a misery of indecision.

"But what's all this talk? Everybody's talking."

"Everybody talks, but what do they know?"

"Oh, I can't make up my mind. You say the N.W.R. ain't goin' through?"

"Not for a long time, anyhow. And the boom might go phut any minute."

"You think I'd better sell, eh?"

"Sell some, and hold the rest for a rise, Mr. Acland. It'll start property moving down that end of the town. Give me a listing and I'll find purchasers."

"Mind, I must have five hundred dollars a lot, cash down. I won't sell for less."

"You won't get it, Mr. Acland. I can't promise you anything like that."

"But if the N.W.R. goes through?"

"It might never go through, or it might come in at the other end of town. You'll be left with all that property on your hands. You know how long a boom lasts. You can sell it now, but you mightn't find anyone willing to touch it with a ten-foot pole next week."

"Oh, I don't know what to do. I hate to think of losin' money. Money's hard to get, young feller, awful hard to get. All right, then; you can sell this here property, just these lots here. I'll hang onto the balance yet. Get the best price you can for 'em—don't let anybody cheat you. Oh, I do hate the thought of losin' money."

"Got him," Ming announced triumphantly to Curtis. "He nearly shed tears, but he gave me the listing at last."

"That's fine, Duke, fine. At the start of a boom it's always hard to get some of 'em to loosen up; they freeze to their stuff, waiting for a raise. Get enough of 'em doing it and it kills off any boom. There's got to be a lot of floating property on the market, turning over all the time, every man on the jump to sell again the minute he buys. You never know when the stuff'll go cold on you."

Kenkenake came in wearing a worried expression.

"Hello, Kicky, vot iss?" inquired Curtis.

"Wish I knew where in hell I could pick up some more trackage. Knowland and Rates are hanging onto theirs like glue, an' old Windjammer Whittaker's just nuts on trackage. He's lousy with money, an' wants to buy up the whole right of way from one end of town to the other. Thinks he'll make a million, damn fool."

Curtis nodded covertly to Ming.

"Know anybody who wants Water Street stuff?" inquired Kenkenake. "I have a parcel on the river-bank near Elm."

"Not much doing in waterfront stuff yet, Kicky," said Curtis. "But you might see F. J. Oakes, he has a notion for a residential park down that way."

"Thanks, I'll hustle over. If you get your claws on any trackage, peddle it to Windjammer before he goes broke."

He rushed out. It was a convention in Gateway at this time for everyone to run about at top speed. A man might stand on a street corner or lean against a

bar and talk for hours, but immediately he began to go anywhere he put down his head and dashed along the street as if pursued by wolves.

Ming shot off in the opposite direction in search of Whittaker, whom he ran to earth in the Imperial Bar.

A. V. Whittaker was a youngish man, stout and florid. He had a great deal of hair growing in upright tufts. Some of these tufts were red, some yellowish, and some almost white. He wore his hat very much on the back of his head, diamond rings on his fat hands, and a diamond pin in a flaming necktie. He had enormous jowls which flapped when he talked, and in a town of noisy and continuous talkers he was easily the noisiest and most continuous, hence his nickname.

He was drunk, but not too drunk to talk, and he had a grievance.

"I don't want to knock this town," he declaimed: "Art V. Whittaker never was a knocker. But . . ." He thumped the bar with a meaty fist. "But what I say, an' I want all of you to listen to me: what I say, there is, right here in this town, a bunch of mossbacks, a bunch of old tightwads, a bunch of deadheads, that are holdin' this town back. They're killin' it dead. Here I am, an' I want trackage. Can I get trackage? I ask you, can I?"

"I can give you three blocks on Ninth," put in Ming.

"Brother, " bellowed Whittaker, "put her there," extending his hand. "You heard me that time, eh? Have one on me. You're talkin' business, I want to meet a man who talks business. I'm a booster, I am—never a knocker."

Negotiations took time, for Whittaker was enamoured of the sound of his own voice, and loved to do business as from a public platform. But his cheque for eight thousand dollars was good, as Ming learned by racing to the bank just before the doors closed. He deposited it to his own account, made out a cheque for seventy-six hundred, had it accepted by the bank, and sought Acland.

"Four hundred dollars commission," said Acland sadly ; "it's a crime. All that money for a few hours of runnin' around. Do you know, young man, how long it took me to save my first four hundred dollars ? Three years hard work. It's sinful."

He was so penetrated by the enormity of the commission that even the cheque for seventy-six hundred failed for long to cheer him up. He all but repudiated the whole transaction ; but Ming was firm, and kept his temper admirably.

"Oh well," sighed Acland at last, "I only give six hundred dollars for that property four years ago. If I do a little better on the rest it won't be so bad."

"Boy," said Curtis paternally, "you've made a good start. Now don't go on a crazy bat, will you ?"

Ming grinned. "I drink only for social and business reasons, old man."

"Well, you have a great gift that way," admitted Curtis. "Wish I had your head. Well, do you still want to go in with me on the sub-division proposition ?"

"I'm game for anything, but I don't want to be tied down. I'd like to work for you on commission. I'll pay half the exes, but we'll have no formal partnership, what ?"

“Exes?”

“Expenses—office rent and so on.”

“Guess perhaps that would suit me best. All right, shake hands, and we’ll go have a little drink. I ain’t had time for one all day.”

“I’ll take my bag along,” said Ming. “I’m going to try the St. Jo’s. I’m sick of cheap boarding-houses.”

He dropped in at the Gent’s Toggery, kept by Richard Black. Black was a handsome man of thirty, inclined to stoutness, who had been a dramatic figure in the town some years earlier, when he had been tried and nearly convicted on a false charge of burglary and murderous assault. He was now a prosperous merchant with a remarkably beautiful wife and three children. His manner was a nice blending of the deferential and the familiar.

“Something in a blue serge? Yes, I think I can suit you. Mr. Duke Ming? I hear you’re doin’ great things for this town, Mr. Ming. There, what do you think of that? Very good material, but I could give this one a better recommend.”

Ming bought a suit, shirts, socks, shoes, overcoat, hat and some light underwear.

“May as well go the whole hog. I’m a man of means now,” he said.

“Buy the rest of the store to-morrow,” urged Curtis. “My tongue’s hanging out for that drink.”

“Certainly, I’ll take your cheque, Mr. Ming,” said Black. “Drop in again any time you need anything in my line.”

“Thanks, I will. Come on, Curtis, the drought is about to be relieved.”

He registered at the St. Jo's, paying fifteen dollars in advance for a week's board and room. That was the rule at the St. Jo's: the proprietor knew his guests and their little weaknesses.

There were twenty letters in that gentleman's name, which was totally unpronounceable to English lips. Nobody ever called him anything but Mike. He was a squat man of extremely powerful build, had a pointed skull covered with stiff black bristles, fierce black eyes, and a broad face disfigured by smallpox. But his manner was suave, his voice soft and sibilant, and his English remarkably good. Smyrna was his port of origin.

Ming was shown to a small but clean and comfortable room on the second floor, where he changed into his new clothes and then joined Curtis in the bar.

There was a tremendous uproar there, real estate the only topic. Deals were being made, and men rushing off to make out transfers, or writing cheques for options to be taken up on the morrow. At that stage of the boom, with everything headed skyward, a man's word was generally good. Large sums of money changed hands almost at a nod.

But Ming was weary: he had been in a state of great tension and in constant movement all day, following on a night of inadequate sleep. The atmosphere, thick with cigar smoke and the fumes of liquor, sickened him, and the drinks he reluctantly sipped seemed compounded of liquid fire and garbage.

"I'm bally well going to bed," he told Curtis. "I have a rotten headache and my knees are wobbly."

"That's right," agreed the American heartily. "That's horse sense, boy. If you want to keep on

your toes, get your sleep, I'm away home right now myself."

Ming was not a heavy sleeper, and he was aroused presently by the trampling of feet in the corridor, loud laughter and the voices of women. The noise did not subside, and presently his curiosity got the better of him. He pulled on his trousers and opened his door. Many other doors on both sides of the passage were open, and there was much coming and going between them, much clamour and rejoicing and the clinking of bottles.

A woman halted before him, short, plump, and very dark, in a black evening dress ornamented with jet. It was a candid dress, concealing nothing of consequence. She lifted a smooth white shoulder, half turning her body, the back of one hand on her hip, and smiled at him provocatively.

"You feel lonesome to-night, boy?" she inquired with a strong foreign accent.

Ming grinned at her. "No, not to-night, little one. Trot along and play."

She pouted at him, moved on to the next open door and entered. A guitar began to tinkle in the big room at the end of the passage. The door was ajar and the noise indicated that there were several persons of both sexes within.

Suddenly the doorway framed a dancing figure, a young woman, lithe and vigorous, white-skinned and copper-haired. She was dancing with more energy than attention to the music, and discarding her clothes as she did so.

Ming caught his breath and stood staring, the pulse in his temples beating like a drum.

She gave a little mischievous squeal, whirled her last garment off over his head, and came dancing and swaying down the passage.

Ray Linquit, the hare-lipped real estate man, came racing after her. Screaming and giggling and waving white arms and legs she was dragged back into the room and the door shut. Ming let out his breath in an explosive sigh, and closed and locked his own door.

"This," he murmured, "is a lively town, but I wish I could get a little sleep."

He was almost asleep when there came a gentle knock. "Who's there?" he called gruffly.

"Let me in, honey boy."

"No."

"Why not, honey?"

"Because I have a headache and I can't afford luxuries."

Then a deep man's voice said something in a peremptory tone, and the woman answered him in a pleading whine.

"But, Mike, he's a swell young feller. I want to be friends with him. Just want to be friends."

"Take her away," shouted Ming. "I want to go to sleep."

"Come on," said Mike firmly. "No foolin' now, Julie, he don't want you to-night."

"A-a-aw, Mike, have a heart."

"Come on, come on, mustn't butt in where you ain't wanted, or I can't keep you around."

The voices died away in a receding grumble and a fretful whimper.

"I wonder if there's a place in this cursed town where

a man can get a decent night's rest?" snorted Ming, burying his ears in the bedclothes.

He was next conscious of a bell ringing downstairs, and woke to find it time to get up. However, he felt refreshed and clear-headed, and after an excellent breakfast walked briskly down to the office.

"Going to hit the high spots?" asked Curtis. "I hear there were wild doings at the St. Jo's last night. Seems that Linquit and Minden put on a wet party and had some wench doing the hula. Were you in on that?"

"Just on the side lines. No question of sleeping while it was going on."

"Huh, Mike had better watch himself: he'll get himself pinched one of these days. He can't run a rackety house plumb in the middle of town, even if there is a boom on."

"They're not exactly the most restful people in the world," admitted Ming, "a little too much innocent mirth and gaiety at unseasonable hours for my taste. But that Levantine brigand knows how to run a hotel. I've got a clean room and a comfortable bed, and the scoffing is tip-top. I haven't found the three things all together since I came to Canada."

"Well, they are a little primitive out here in the West," said Curtis, "but you have to remember it's a new country—nothing here but wild Indians a few years ago. I guess Mike can run a hotel, but watch out for his lady friends, and don't play any more poker there than you have to."

The boom flurry died down again in a few days, as Curtis had prophesied. Property owners tried to rush

their market, asking outrageous prices, and frightening buyers away. The expansive mood disappeared; men no longer shouted information from the housetops; news had to be paid for, and commission splitting became general. Bad cheques also made their appearance here and there.

Ming contrived to do better than most of his rivals. His long legs covered a lot of ground, and he wasted less time than they in barren bar-room talk. His sobriety betrayed him into none of the follies that men commit when they are carrying more liquor than they can conveniently manage.

His imperturbable good humour made him friends easily. Within a week everybody knew Duke, liked him and respected him.

There was something a little uncanny in his apparent ability to swallow unlimited quantities of whisky without showing any of the usual effects, and it tended to make men seek his opinion as a man of unusual gifts.

He himself was perfectly happy. Life spun about him in dizzy circles, and there was joy in matching his keen wits with wits as keen, and his restless energy found a perfect outlet in racing about the town all day.

He took small part in the wilder doings at the St. Jo's; he was usually too tired to do so, and he was also restrained by a certain natural fastidiousness. He did not desire any part in what was common to all. The women virtually gave him up.

Curtis was remarkably sober. If his morning mood was not so savagely cynical, he was not so gaily social in the afternoon, and he went early to bed. He was working hard on his sub-division.

"Iron-jawed business man," taunted Ming. "Come and frivol, O strong and silent one ; all your little play-mates are crying for you."

"Let 'em, I can't work and cut up too. There'll be plenty time enough for that when the boom peters out. Furthermore, if somebody don't start something around here pretty soon, it is going to peter out. Can't you work up another racket, use your head ?"

"Retire and meditate, eh ? All right, I will. It does begin to look as if we'd lost the Trades. Winds light and shifting, all hands wear ship. Stuns'ls alow and aloft and bear away on the other tack."

"Don't know what you're talking about, but the town's bogging down again. Somebody's got to tie a firecracker to her tail. No enterprise in these damn Canucks."

Ming lounged to the window and stood looking out across the river, inexpressibly beautiful in the endless twilight of early summer.

People passed and repassed continually on Water Street, and his attention was drawn from the landscape to them.

"Perfect horde of curious human animals on the streets of this town," he remarked. "Talk about the tower of Babel."

Curtis rose and joined him.

"Immigrants," he said. "Gateway will be a big town one of these days, but not yet. When this boom busts, all these poor devils will have to turn to and clean up the mess."

"Cheerful blighter, you are—been too sober lately for your own good. Can you pick out the nationalities of these chaps ?"

"Some of 'em. Those two birds are talking German, anyway, and I think those three are Swedes: you can tell by their mournful sing-song kind of talk."

"That's a Norwegian," said Ming, pointing to a young fellow, blonde, slender and erect, in a close-fitting leather jacket and breeches, high boots, a broad leather belt and a round cloth cap. "I've sailed with fellows like that."

"Here's a New Englander," chuckled Curtis. "Hear him say ceaow for cow?" A big man with a craggy face went by on stiff legs.

Now two handsome men with blue eyes and brown hair strolled by, walking with a slight swagger. They spoke a language that sounded like English, but was not.

"Danes," said Ming, "you can tell by the way they pronounce r. Lots of 'em at sea too. Damn good men, they'll get no better anywhere."

"Not many Americans in this crowd," said Curtis, "but I think that fellow's a Southerner. I'd know if he'd open his mouth."

"'Ere y'are, Whitechapel," contributed Ming. "If those two weren't born in Seven Dials I'm a Dutchman."

Two sharp-featured youths with quizzical eyes paused a moment outside the door. They wore large flat caps of a distressing pattern, and each had a half-inch cigarette butt pasted to his lower lip. They conversed in a twanging drawl.

"I sye, Bert, got anuvver bleedin' gahsper in yer trahsis?"

"Ah, an' you ain't gettin' it neever, it's me larst bloody Woodbine."

"One chap's asking for a cigarette and the other won't give it him," translated Ming.

"And you call that language English?"

"Well, you can hardly call it Chinese, can you?"

"I don't believe there is an English language spoken outside Boston," said Curtis.

"Blasted Yankee arrogance, old man. Here's a couple of Scotties, but what damned lingo are those men talking?"

"Irish, I think. Lots of Micks in Boston—I've heard 'em with a brogue that sounded like Choctaw."

"Not seafaring men," said Ming, "and I've never been in Ireland. I'm looking for a man from my own county in England. I've heard Devon men and Lancashire tykes, but no Cloamshire yet. My sainted aunt, what kind of an ape is this?"

Walking on his heels like a bear, there approached a heavily built, round-shouldered man in a beehive cap of mangy fur, a ragged and greasy sheepskin jacket, and high clumsy boots. He had a broad, brutish face, high cheekbones and small ferile green eyes. He was hairy and dirty, and stank to heaven of garlic.

Shuffling submissively at his heels came a shapeless, short-legged, broad-hipped, cow-faced female, in a tight bodice and several ragged petticoats reaching to mid-calf, with a filthy black shawl tied over her head.

"Bohunks," said Curtis, and spat. "Gad, how they stink."

The bright wisdom of Ottawa had imported hordes of these Slavs into the West at that time. They were a simple, impulsive and childlike people, whose innocent spontaneity might at any moment impel them to cut a

throat or commit a rape. They were ingenuous and incurable liars, and clumsy but persistent thieves. Soap they knew not, and the louse was their companion from birth. Guiltless of manners or morals, to be swinishly drunk was the summit of their aspirations.

The West was to be much indebted to them, and to build in their honour and for their use great prisons and lunatic asylums, mightily multiplying judges and magistrates, policemen, jailers and attendants, to the great profit of lawyers, bailiffs and handcuff makers.

And now came a little group of Indians, speaking their soft and melodious language, fast perishing from the earth. They were strange and ill at ease in this town that yesterday had been almost all theirs, and they hurried by to their teepees across the river. Gateway was no longer the frontier.

CHAPTER V

"FEEL like coming in with me on a bigger office?" asked Curtis one day. "This dump is too small and out of the way. I want to get on the Avenue."

"I'm with you, best beloved. Whither thou goes I will go, and so forth."

They rented an old frame house on Maple Avenue, tore out the front and put in plate-glass windows, installed a counter, a safe, filing cabinets, desks and a typewriter, and three gaudy wall-maps, the first of Lakeview Heights, the second of the City of Gateway, and the third of the Dominion of Canada. Across the whole front of the building they erected a sign, electrically illuminated at night, setting forth the glories of Lakeview Heights.

"Now, I'll tell you how to handle this sub-division stuff," said Curtis. "It's a little different from inside stuff. Of course, the old guff about buying for a turnover still goes, but lots of these poor fish will be looking for homes—inside stuff will be so high a poor man won't be able to touch it, and the sky'll be the limit for rents.

"Your line is: own your own home and be independent. Hammer it into 'em: no rent to pay, low taxes, all the time they want to pay in. Meantime, the value of the property increasing year by year: town bound

to move out their way as it grows : street cars running right past the door inside a year. Don't matter how little they have to pay down, get it. If you can't get fifty dollars, take twenty, take ten."

"Take their shoes?" grinned Ming.

"If they're new shoes. Watches, rings, any dern thing that can be turned into cash. The thing's on the level: the property's there, and they'll get title as soon as they pay up. Maybe it ain't worth what they'll pay for it, but right now there's not an inch of property in the whole damned town worth a quarter of what they're asking for it, and it'll be worse presently. It's a skin game, but who the devil cares: we're out for scalps."

"Righto, cocky. I'll sharpen my little tomahawk, and go on the warpath."

Lakeview Heights took; inside property being at the moment too high for profitable gambling, speculators turned eagerly to the cheap lots. There was an immediate rush to lay out other sub-divisions. Syndicates approached farmers living a full three miles beyond the city limits with proposals for cutting their farms up into twenty-five foot lots.

Agricultural operations ceased within a wide area, and fields recently devoted to grain or pasturage now sprouted a crop of little white stakes. Signposts marked streets that had never been travelled and never would be. "Choice residential lots" were quoted on the market at as low as five dollars down and the balance in ten equal monthly payments.

An acre of farm-land costing forty or fifty dollars will cut up into a number of twenty-five foot lots, and the

first payment more than covered the whole cost of sub-division. If a speculator received the full price of only one lot out of each sub-divided acre he was nothing out of pocket.

But Lakeview Heights had the advantage of them all in being first on the market, closest to town, and most easily accessible. Curtis went to some expense to have a passable road built to it. He and Ming were kept on the run all day, and far into the night: there was hardly any one so poor he could not buy a couple of lots in Lakeview Heights.

"We'll have to get a steno in here," said Curtis. "We'd do more business if we could both be out on the street at the same time. And there's getting to be quite a chunk of correspondence. I hate having a woman around, but if you get a good-looking one it brings the yaps in to chew the rag with her. Guess I'll put an ad. in the *Banner*."

The *Daily Banner* was a dismal little, smudgy, four-page paper, containing two columns of telegraphic news, the remainder being made up by the editor with scissors and paste and "boiler-plate." But, such as it was, it was the only daily paper within a hundred miles.

The advertisement brought first an elderly woman who was willing to do anything that was ree-fined, but who confessed blandly to a total ignorance of shorthand, typewriting, and business procedure generally.

"I'd have taken her at that if she wasn't so damned homely," said Curtis. "Woman are a pest at any time, but when they're homely as well as devilish, I won't have 'em around at all."

"I don't agree with your thesis in general, old man," said Ming, "but that lady's face is one of the things in a man's life he'd just as soon forget. I'm glad you didn't engage her."

He was standing at the window next morning, just preparatory to going out, when he gave a start of surprise and pleasure.

"Look at it," he said. "Is she coming here, Curtis?"

A young woman stood across the street, gazing doubtfully at the office.

"Nice-looking girl," admitted Curtis grudgingly. "She does look as if she was headed this way."

But she passed on.

"Damn it," groaned Ming, "I hoped she wanted the job. Now, I suppose we'll have to engage some human what-is-it, or the wild woman of Zanzibar."

"Shut up," warned Curtis in a low tone.

The door opened slowly and the girl came in. She looked at Ming appealingly, and her sensitive underlip quivered. His heart missed a beat, and he seemed to have forgotten how to breathe. Her face became a sort of blur, but he bounded without conscious volition to her side, and welcomed her with a strained and fatuous smile.

"Is—is there anything I can do for you?" he stammered.

"I came about that job," she replied in a low hurried voice. "Have you got anyone?"

"No, no, no, not yet, not yet. I think you would suit us. Won't you come in, please, and take a chair?"

Curtis' coldly unemotional voice cut in, "Had any experience in office work, young lady?"

The faint smile dawning on her face was swept away, and she gave a timid start. "Yes—a little," she answered breathlessly. "I took a course in stenography, and worked in an insurance office."

Her accent was Canadian, but her voice lower in pitch than is often found among Western Canadian women. There was, moreover, a subtle timbre in it which exercised an extraordinary influence on Ming, who was sensitive to sounds.

"We want somebody to look after the office when we're out," pursued Curtis. "Somebody who can answer the 'phone, and take down messages accurately. That'll be the principal thing. There'll be some letters to write of course, but not a great many. We'll pay fifty dollars a month to start. Will that suit you?"

She assented with a mute nod.

"And when do you want to start?"

"I can start right now."

"Fine," said Curtis, thawing slightly. "We're very busy to-day. Take off your coat and hat in that little room in there; it'll be your room."

"Er—ah—may I inquire what your name is?" babbled Ming.

"Seebright, M. A. Seebright."

"Mine's Ming, and this is Mr. Curtis."

She acknowledged the introductions graciously. She had swiftly gained assurance: already she had dismissed Ming as subjugated and harmless, but upon Curtis she kept a wary eye, and to his rapid and concise instructions she listened attentively.

"I think that's all, Miss Seebright. There are no letters just now, and we're both going out. Tell anybody who calls we'll be in some time before noon. Take down any 'phone calls that come in, and be very careful about names and numbers. All right, Duke; we'll leave you to it, Miss Seebright."

He hooked his arm in that of his reluctant partner, and drew him firmly into the street.

"Do you go dozy in the head every time you set eyes on a bit of rag?" he inquired caustically.

Ming blinked like a man awakened from a trance. "No, but, you know, dash it all, you have to be civil."

"You've a fine head for liquor and you're a corking salesman," said Curtis sadly. "Women are your weakness, eh? Damn it, you never meet a good man, but he's got a punk spot in him. I never could understand a man going dippy over women, the world's most useless thing, the universal pain in the neck. Arrgh."

"But you don't know anything about women, old man."

"I've been married twice," replied Curtis with a sudden rasp in his voice and lowering of his brows. "Both were she-devils."

"But they aren't all like that. I'll grant you a good many, but, you know, there are exceptions."

"I thought so once myself, but there are no exceptions. Shut up, I know you can't help yourself. Women have been the ruin of more men than whisky ever was. There are no good wives, though some of 'em are worse than others; my first was prussic acid, but the second was only ptomaine poison."

Ming began to grin.

"It's no joke," said Curtis very seriously, "I'm trying to warn you. I've taken a real fancy to you, boy. It won't do any good, but I have to warn you. Women and business mix worse than business and liquor. If you're going to stay in business, cut out women in business hours. I don't care what you do with that girl out of business hours, but in business hours you want to remember she's just our steno."

Ming's face had flushed rebelliously, but the affection in Curtis' voice had its effect. The American was plainly in deadly earnest, and there was also satisfaction in the thought that he would not be a rival.

"All right, old man," he answered placably. "I'll leave you the field during office hours, but outside of them I get a free hand, eh?"

Curtis shrugged his shoulders. "If that's the best you can do. And, another thing, don't duck back to the office the minute I'm out of sight."

Ming flushed guiltily.

"And if you're bound to make a hit with a girl," pursued Curtis, "go to her with money in your hands, a woman has more use for money than a man has. She's greedier for it. Most of the money in the world is spent on or by women; men earn it and women blow it in.

"You may think you're pretty to look at, and have winning ways. That kind of stuff may get a smile out of a girl, but the man she falls on the neck of is the man with the cash. It don't matter if he's a cross-eyed baboon with a bad breath. You hustle around during the day, and you'll have money to shoot in evenings.

If you hang around the office during business hours you'll be broke when evening comes, and she'll leave you flat, and go out with the other fellow."

"You've a poisonous tongue, dearly beloved," said Ming with a wry grin.

"I'm talking sense, I know women. If you expect to make a hit, attend to business: it takes more than a sweet smile to get a wife and keep her. Now, rustle along and see if you can get a buyer for that Moab stuff; it's a good buy at the price."

Ming's heart was not in his work, and he failed to make the sale. He drifted back to the office before noon, to find Oppenshaw sprawling his great bulk on the counter, and grinning at Miss Seebright. She sat demurely at her desk, making little or no response to his blandishments.

Ming had a sudden and profound conviction of the extreme desirability of breaking Oppenshaw's neck; he even devised almost in a flash a neat and efficient way of doing it. But civilization lays a more or less cramping hand on one's native impulses. Who of us would not have committed a score of homicides but for the resultant inconvenience to ourselves.

His race and breeding supplied him with a pale substitute for bodily violence; his eyes became two pieces of glass, and his face a frozen mask.

"Ah, have you any particular business here, Mr. Oppenshaw?" he inquired in a voice that would have made a doormat get up and bite him.

Oppenshaw stared, and his ruddy face turned a rich shade of purple. "I want to see Hank Curtis, if you'd like to know," he replied curtly.

"Mr. Curtis is not in. I suggest that you look elsewhere for him."

"My God." Oppenshaw's expression indicated that he was about equally divided between anger and mirth. "Did something bite you?" Shaking his head, he lumbered out of the office.

"Was he annoying you, Miss Seebright?" begged Ming tremulously.

She lifted her devastating glance to his. "He was talking silly," she replied calmly. "Asked me to go to lunch with him. He's fresh, but he don't mean any harm."

Ming ground his teeth; he had not yet learnt the casual and hearty ways of the West, and his feelings were outraged. It was considered rather in the nature of a compliment to ask a strange lady to lunch in the boom days. Men who were prospering were filled with an abounding generosity, and any pretty girl commanded their instant and openly avowed homage.

He formed a desperate resolve. "Miss Seebright," he gulped, "would you care to have lunch with me?"

"Why, I think that would be very nice," she replied, in those soft dove notes that so thrilled his ear. "But who'd mind the office?"

"The office is used to minding itself," exulted Ming. "Curtis has a key. Put on your hat and coat."

She went into the little room behind, and stood rather helplessly with her hat in her hand.

"No mirror," she murmured plaintively. "How can I put my hat on?"

In an instant he was galloping down the street to the nearest hardware. He hung the glass on the wall with careful reference to her height.

"This'll be your room," he said. "I'll have it cleaned out and made comfortable. It's never used for anything."

Curtis came up just as they were leaving. His face was gloomy.

"I'm taking Miss Seebright out to lunch," Ming explained breathlessly. "It'll be all right, old man, what?"

"Oh, I guess so," answered Curtis wearily. "But do you figure to insult everybody who comes into the office after this?"

"I'll explain later, I'll explain," promised Ming hurriedly. "Miss Seebright is waiting for me."

She was very reserved during the meal, though she ate with a good appetite. He was not his usual glib self; he had forgotten how one behaves with women not of the sisterhood of Lais. He was awed by her sublime and saintly glance; such eyes could only belong to a being of angelic purity and sinlessness. They returned to the office within the hour.

Curtis got up with the gloomy look still upon his face.

"Come and have a drink, Duke," he said with authority.

Ming followed reluctantly.

"Now, see here, boy, I'm not interfering with your courting, and I don't want to. But try and remember there's a place for everything. There'll be a heap of fellows coming into the office, and pretty near every last one of 'em 'll try to make a hit with the girl. Men are that way when they see a good-looker, and girls are scarce out here. You'll just have to learn to stand back. They won't insult her: you'll very seldom find a woman

insulted in the West. A man's always a fool when he's dealing with a woman, but these idiots don't mean any harm by their blah."

"What did Oppenshaw tell you?" growled Ming.

"Oh, Ben's a good head, he just laughed over it, but you'll have the whole town giving you the laugh if you pull any more stunts like that. It'll hurt you in business and it'll hurt you with the girl: she won't want you to think you have the handcuffs on her. A girl's looks are public property, and if a fellow gets any kick out of looking at her he has a right to."

"All right, all right," said Ming, still sulky.

"Stay away from the office this afternoon," advised Curtis. "Try and get some business done: she'll think all the more of you."

Ming perambulated the town in a depressed frame of mind. Even the lovely Sweetwater sweeping majestically along failed to bring peace to his soul. He had an acute feeling of unworthiness and a strong resolve to lead a better life.

He passed Oppenshaw on the street, and the big man gave him a grin and a friendly nod. He smiled feebly back with the shamed consciousness that he had made a fool of himself.

Even an unexpected encounter with a man who wanted the Moab property, though it meant a hundred and fifty dollar commission, failed to raise his spirits appreciably. At last he could stay away no longer, and hurried back to the office.

"I sent her home," said Curtis blandly. "There was nothing much for her to do, and there'll be a bunch of

pretty rough talkers in here in a minute. I have a deal on with Doddy Wright and Ham Wofflin, and Ham's most always drunk by this time in the afternoon."

"Where does she live?"

"I never thought to ask her, it's none of my business. How about running the town looking for her?"

"Damn you, Curtis, you're a hard-hearted ruffian," said Ming with a rueful grin. "I'll go and get drunk."

"Best thing you could do," agreed Curtis, "make you forget her."

But Ming did not get drunk; in effect, he did just what Curtis had suggested, and walked up one street and down another, his heart bounding at sight of every young woman. But he caught no glimpse of Miss Seebright. He returned to the St. Jo's in very low spirits, haunted by her madonna face and those magic notes in her voice.

The plump girl in black sidled up to him at the head of the stairs. "Lonesome to-night, boy?" she wheedled.

He did not turn her away with some light jest; for the line of her neck from ear to shoulder somehow reminded him of Miss Seebright.

"Too lonesome for company to-night, Julie," he sighed. "But buy yourself something with this."

Her greedy little paw closed avidly on the five-dollar bill he held out, and with the other she reached up and patted his cheek.

"Poor boy," she said softly, "you do not have much fun, eh? Nev' min', good day come to-morrow maybe."

He took care to lock his door, a wise precaution in the St. Jo's for a man who did not care to be visited unexpectedly by ladies in various stages of intoxication

and deshabelle. He was filled with a powerful impulse toward a virtuous life.

"I've got to get out of here," he decided. "This is a fine place for a man to be in who hopes to have anything to do with a decent girl—bally den of infamy."

For him an aura of sanctity surrounded Miss Seebright, and when she arrived at work in the morning he jumped up reverentially. There was nothing he could actually do, but he hovered, giving the impression of being ready to fly to the ends of the earth at her lightest request. She smiled slightly, revealing beautiful teeth.

"Good morning, Mr. Ming."

If all the angel choir had burst into song at once, he could not have been more enraptured.

"Good morning, Miss Seebright; beautiful day."

It was a dull day with a raw north wind, but for him it was morning in Paradise. She did not contradict him: it does not depress a woman to see a grown man reduced to imbecility at sight of her.

Curtis came in and nodded with a sardonic twist of his mouth. Ming did not like to meet his eye: a man in love knows that he is contemptible and ridiculous.

"I have some letters, please, Miss Seebright," said Curtis briskly. "Close up that deal with Haus, Duke?"

"No, but I can't see him before ten o'clock."

"Well, they tell me old Acland is getting ready to let go some more of his Ninth Avenue stuff; you handled him pretty successfully last time. How about tackling him again?"

Ming made a rebellious grimace, and the American's keen eyes twinkled.

"Duke Ming's a fine salesman, Miss Seebright," he remarked, "but just a little lazy. If he'd get over that he'd make money fast."

She smiled mechanically. Ming caught up his hat with a growl and marched out. He closed the deal with the German, and returned to take Miss Seebright to lunch.

Somehow he could not get his tongue to work; what he had to say seemed too trivial in the presence of that perfect face and those unfathomable eyes.

She was still reticent. He learned only that she was Canadian, that she had travelled about the West extensively with a brother, but that she was now alone. Where her brother was she did not say. It was not until the end of the meal, when he let fall some word about calling on Acland, that she showed animation.

"I hope you can do business with him, Mr. Ming; it's so miserable being poor."

Lack of money had never troubled him: it takes a woman to make a man understand that poverty is degraded and criminal. He was deeply impressed with her wisdom, and fired with an urge to merit her approval.

"I'll make the old miser part," he cried gaily. "Jove! how he does hate paying commissions."

Feeling fortified and invincible, he bore down all Acland's querulous objections, and obtained permission to sell two more blocks of the Ninth Avenue property.

Windjammer Whittaker still had some money. The one idea in his thick skull was to forestall the N.W.R., and he would buy no other property, though every bird of prey in town had tried to fleece him. He readily bought the two blocks.

Ming returned to the office in triumph, and had his reward in a sweet smile. But Miss Seebright would not go out with him that night, though she permitted him the honour of taking her home.

"No, I don't go out evenings, Mr. Ming," she repeated at the gate, "I don't want to get myself talked about. I'm all by myself, and a girl can't be too careful."

"And I'm living in a sink of iniquity," he told himself penitently. "I've jolly well got to get a respectable diggings."

CHAPTER VI

THAT evening he found lodgings with Mrs. Oliveau. She was a tall, pale, flat-chested woman with long front teeth and a slight lisp. She carried her hands crossed limply on her rather prominent stomach, and had a trick of rolling her washed-out blue eyes.

"I hope you will be very comfortable, Mr. Ming," she said in a twittering voice. "Gentlemen who have roomed with me say that I always made them comfortable. I believe in comfort. After all, you know, we're only in this world once, and why be uncomfortable? Exactly."

"Quite right, Mrs. Oliveau."

He took his bag round next day, and was introduced to Mrs. Oliveau's two daughters.

"This here's Jocelinda."

Jocelinda was like her mother, rather thinner, not so tall. She wore glasses and her complexion was a pale green. Her heavy lids hid her eyes, and she looked at one stealthily out of the corners. She was a person of long silences punctuated by bursts of talk delivered in a high whining voice. Ming felt an aversion for her at sight.

"And this," said Mrs. Oliveau with a simper, "is my baby. Her name's Merinillia."

"Marinella, Mrs. Oliveau?"

"No, no, Merinillia. I made it up myself; I think it's pretty. What I say, we only have to go through this world once, so why tote around a common name like Mary, or Polly? My name's Jane, you see what I mean? Exactly."

Merinillia was small and lively, with a broad bar of black eyebrow across her forehead, a snub nose, a wide mouth, and dark blue eyes. She had a direct stare and a friendly grin. Her age was about sixteen, but Jocelinda was evidently much older.

"We call 'em Merry an' Jo," said Mrs. Oliveau. "An' merry she is. But you ought to hear Jo sing—like a little angel. Exactly."

"Now, ma," whined Jo, and twisted her thin shoulders.

"Yep, she's the noise-maker in our family," said Merry crisply. "Hollers like a cat with its tail in a door."

"Now, Merry, you leave Jo be," reproved her mother.

"Well, she didn't ought to took my side-comb, ma."

"It wasn't your comb," said Jo sharply.

"Girls, girls, quit your scrappin'. You're only goin' through life once, so why fight? Exactly."

"Oh, quit saying ezackly, ma," protested Merry.

"He'll think you're crazy," pointing her thumb at Ming.

"Just a habit of mine," explained Mrs. Oliveau.

"No harm in it?"

"Not at all, not at all," agreed Ming politely.

She seemed willing to hold him in conversation all evening, but he escaped up to his room. It was clean and the bed was good.

"Well, the place seems respectable anyhow," he mused. "Hope that cat-faced female isn't too bally vocal."

There came a lull in the boom, no one seemed to have any heart for business. Buyers could not make up their minds, sellers were reluctant to accept prices offered. People had begun to doubt the N.W.R.'s arrival, and to regard sub-divisions with distrust.

Ming did not progress very fast with Miss Seebright. He retained the privilege of paying for her lunch each day, though there was a swarm of other aspirants for the honour. But she still refused to come out with him in the evenings, and remained extremely uncommunicative.

She was a normal stenographer: that is, her spelling was vague, and her punctuation peculiar. But she was fairly accurate on the telephone, and handled callers with dignity, though without hauteur. Her beauty was indirectly the means of bringing a good deal of business to the firm, for men were glad of an excuse to drop in for a look at her, and perhaps a little smile or a word.

"No lazier than most women and good sucker bait," was Curtis' acrid comment.

Ming let it pass, for the American's attitude to the girl in the office was perfect: polite and considerate without being in the least degree familiar.

As she became more used to her job she grew more and more unpunctual, and was seldom to be seen much before ten. Ming permitted her to idle through her lunch for the mere pleasure of being with her. If it was a fine day, and most summer days are fine in Gateway, they frequently took a short stroll along the banks of the Sweetwater.

He himself was leading a life of extreme asceticism, and finding it very dull. He avoided the bars in the evening, and wearied of lonely walks. He had come

to feel a warm regard for Merry and Mrs. Oliveau, but Jocelinda sent cold shudders through him. He was always meeting her unexpectedly, and though she never faced him directly, he would catch a feline gleam out of the corner of her hooded eye as she went by.

Merry was frankness personified, too much so. The room she shared with her sister was directly across the passage from his own, and her door was always open. He could not escape startling revelations. She also had a habit of pervading the house in a minimum of attire. Her mother protested weakly.

"Merry, what will Mr. Ming think of you? You ought to be ashamed."

"Oh, him, he don't matter. Besides, I got my shirt on. You don't care, do you, Duke?"

"I think you're an immodest and reprehensible brat."

She stuck her tongue out at him, and turned and fled, a whirl of scanty petticoat and bare white legs.

"Don't mind her, Mr. Ming," pleaded Mrs. Oliveau. "She terrible, but there ain't a speck of harm in her."

"I'm quite sure there isn't, Mrs. Oliveau."

"She's wild, like her dad. The Lord knows where he is now, somewhares up in the Ar'tic I guess. He won't stay put no way. He'll drop in here sudden like next year maybe. Not a word where he's been or what he's been doin'. Sometimes he has money, an' then we live high for a while : oh, he's a terror to blow money. Never stops till he's flat broke. Other times he comes in on his uppers, that ga'nt an' frostbit you wonder he's alive. Then I have to turn to an' feed him up, an' away he goes again just like the birds. Ain't seen him since a year ago last Aprile. Oh, well, he says he's only

goin' through the world once, an' he wants to see all he can of it."

"Mrs. Oliveau, I'm lonely in the evenings, would you and the girls care to spend an evening with me at the theatre?"

"Well, that's very nice of you, Mr. Ming. I'd be real glad. But I don't want to do any imposin' on you."

"No imposition at all, Mrs. Oliveau, I'd be delighted."

So he took the whole family to the theatre, and afterwards got rather into the habit of taking Merry out to a picture show once or twice a week. Their intercourse was on a footing of frank friendship; he spoke to her with a fraternal bluntness when she annoyed him, and she was rebellious and saucy at times.

He would have been quite happy at the Oliveaus' if it had not been for Jocelinda's singing. She had an X-ray voice; it would penetrate anything. She expressed her soul longings in hymns of an erotic nature, accompanying herself on a wheezy parlour organ. After much suffering, Ming contrived tactfully to intimate that he did not care for music.

"You don't know what you're missing, Mr. Ming," his landlady assured him. "Me an' Jo couldn't live without music, I could sit an' listen to her all day. But there are folks like that. Merinillia she ain't got a note of music in her, nor her father ain't. But if the music don't get into your heart an' lift you up . . . You know what I mean? Exactly."

"Ever hear of Thunder Falls?" asked Curtis one day.

"Somebody said something about 'em the other day, but I wasn't listening," said Ming carelessly. "Why?"

"Well, you'd better listen, because if we don't get something under this boom soon it's going to flop. Damn it, I never saw a town so hard to wake up. These Canucks are slower than the second coming: they don't talk enough. Down in the States half a dozen men would get together and talk up a town of half a million population in a month. Inside of another month they'd have made their killing and hopped out. In the time I've been in this town they could have washed up and put away a couple of booms. You go out now and ask about Thunder Falls, and then talk about it. It don't matter much what a man talks about as long as he gets things moving. A boom travels principally on wind, and these damn Canucks seem short of breath."

Ming was directed unanimously to Phineas Dibble. Dibble was a short stout man, lame in one leg from a bullet received in the Reil rebellion of 1885. He had bulging blue eyes and a tuft of yellowish white hair stiffly erect above each ear. His straggling moustache was iron-grey, and he had a curious pouch under his chin which puffed up when he talked. A retired civil servant and a bachelor, he lived in a small neat shanty on Water Street.

"You've come to the right man to hear about Thunder Falls, sir," he declaimed. "It's the golden future of Gateway. Thousands of electric horse-power, sir, going to waste, going absolutely to waste. Utilized, that fall will make this town another gem in the crown of the British Empire."

"This blighter is a flag-flapping pomposity," reflected Ming, feeling boredom steal upon him like an opiate.

Dibble had an unusual voice, a monotonous rumble that swelled at intervals of about three minutes to a peacock scream. Ming lapsed into a state of coma, rousing with a start at the recurrent falsetto shrieks. Presently he learned to anticipate them, to brace himself and let them pass harmlessly by.

Grotesque pictures floated before his inward vision. He saw the British lion, crowned with maple leaves, dance a fandango with the Canadian beaver, while Thunder Falls descended from immeasurable heights in the background, and the fascinated sun at his zenith refused resolutely to set upon the British Empire.

At the end of two hours he had scarcely opened his mouth, for Dibble was not to be interrupted. It was his great speech; he had no other, and he had devoted years of his life to its memorization. He was glad at any time to inflict the whole or any part of it upon anyone who would listen.

Ming became aware that he was being asked a question.

"I beg your pardon."

"I asked if you'd come and look at the Falls with me to-morrow? A magnificent sight, sir, worth anybody's while. The whole future of this town is wrapped up in it."

"'Fraid I can't get away to-morrow," lied Ming hastily. "Awfully busy, you know."

"Next day then. Any day at all, my time's my own. I'm determined to show them to you, you'll never regret it. A wonderful sight, wonderful, wonderful. I'll call around at your office."

Ming hurriedly escaped without committing himself, and walked up town between anger and amusement.

"Hoo-hoo, Duke," hailed Borowdell from the door of his office. "Who did the talkin', eh? Hey, Kicky, come here an' look at him: Finny's talked him wall-eyed."

"Blast you," grinned Ming, "I might have known you were up to something when you sent me to see that old blatherskite."

"Goin' to see the Falls?" chuckled Borowdell.

"Not if I know it. Did you ever see 'em?"

"No, an' don't figure to. Don't believe anybody ever saw 'em but Finny. Most people think he imagined 'em."

Curtis took a different view. "You go and see 'em," he insisted. "There may be more in it than you think. Dibble's an old windbag, but even windbags sometimes hit a good thing. He's made everybody so tired with his everlasting speech-making that they won't listen to him any more, but a man can often learn things even from a fool. Nothing to keep you here with business all shot to pieces, and it'll do you good to get a day's outing and see the country."

"Suppose I'll have to," grumbled Ming, "but I'll stuff my ears with cotton-wool and take a quart of whisky along."

"Come along, Mr. Ming, fine day, just the day for the Falls. Have to make an early start if you want to get home before dark."

Ming stared without enthusiasm at Phineas Dibble, his aged buckboard and his team of ragged bronchos.

"Why not take a motor, it's much faster?" he inquired.

"One of those damned stink wagons? Huh, it'd be drowned in the muskeg before we got half-way. There's no roads out where we're going, man. But the ponies'll take us through. It's all right; I brought grub along and a little touch of the right stuff. Jump in."

"Oh, I don't know that I feel very much like it to-day, Mr. Dibble. Fact is, I have several very important things to see to."

"Beat it along, Duke," urged Curtis. "I can attend to anything you want looked after. Mr. Dibble'll show you a bit of the country; I only wish I could get away myself and go with you."

"You damned old liar," growled Ming in his ear.

He climbed slowly into the buggy, and Curtis waved a mocking hand at his scowling face.

They drove across the bridge, newly opened to traffic, and plunged into the pines on a winding but well-beaten trail. The bronchos, wild and only half-broken, indulged at times in terrifying antics, but the old pioneer handled them with masterly skill.

He even found time to repeat almost verbatim his speech of the previous day. Ming found it more bearable with the changing vistas of the forest to occupy his attention. The mosquitoes also forced themselves upon his notice; he had never encountered them in such numbers or of such reckless ferocity. They kept pace with the rig, or rose up in armies to meet it.

He crushed them in scores upon the back of his neck, and they formed a grey net on the ponies. Dibble brushed them from the horses with gentle strokes of

his whip, but hardly seemed to feel them upon himself.

"They are kind of thick," he admitted placidly to the cursing Ming. "Tie a white handkerchief around your neck, they don't like white. Don't know why, but it's a fact."

It was, with a white handkerchief pulled well up at the back Ming found himself much more at ease.

They came out upon a wide stretch of bois brule, a desert of blackened stumps and rampikes, where tiny pines a few inches high stuck up out of the sand. The wheels cut deep and the ponies fell to a walk, but a fresh breeze drove off the mosquitoes. They turned off on a narrow and unfrequented trail and descended into a muskeg, a wall-like thicket of willow, alder, spruce and tamarac.

"The flies'll be bad in here," warned Dibble.

Out of the windless air the mosquitoes fell upon them like a blanket. Ming flogged himself desperately with a leafy branch, while the ponies laboured slowly through the sticky black slime in which the buggy sank almost to the axles.

"What would a stink wagon do here?" chuckled Dibble. "And you wait till we come to the real bad place."

They crossed a narrow dyke of clay and came to a wide and sluggish creek. The water was only a few inches deep, but the mud appeared bottomless.

"Get up in there, you little fools," roared Dibble. "I won't leave you drown, get up in the collar."

The ponies kicked and splashed and flung themselves from side to side, sending gouts of foam and spray high

into the air. The water filled the bottom of the buckboard, and Ming drew his feet up on the seat. Just when he began to think the whole turnout was doomed to final engulfment in the bog, the team found firm footing and with convulsive bounds emerged upon dry land.

"Not so bad," commented Dibble placidly. "I was scared we might get stuck."

"Your apprehensions were not confined to yourself," answered Ming.

They ascended rapidly among tall trees and scattered granite boulders. There was no longer any trail, and the old pioneer wound in and out among obstacles, or descended with an axe to cut away some fallen tree that blocked their path.

"Hardly ever anybody comes this way," he explained. "There ain't but damn few ever saw the Falls."

"I can quite believe it," Ming assured him.

Still they went on: someone in remote ages had doubtless passed that way, but there was no sign of it.

"Hear it?" said Dibble suddenly.

The buckboard took a sudden lurch and Ming found himself staring at a jagged and vicious-looking rock just under his nose. Then the buckboard as violently rolled the other way and flung him against Dibble.

"What did you say?" he gasped.

"Hear the Falls?"

There was a faint and rhythmic humming in the air. They emerged upon a small meadow with a fringe of tall spruce on the far side. Dibble hopped out, unhitched the team, hobbled them, and turned them loose to graze.

"Now I'll show you," he announced, his bulging eyes staring. "You didn't half believe me, but you will now."

He led the way at a quick hobble, panting with eagerness, through the fringing spruce to the lip of a chasm. Dibble pointed, his lips moved, but the words were drowned in the noble music of the waters. The river came foaming down a littered stairway of granite rock and leaped out in a bold and beautiful curve, to fall into a boiling basin forty feet below.

Ming looked and turned gratefully to his guide, whose commonplace aspect was transfigured by a look of pure and unselfish pride and happiness. They shook hands, and Ming slapped him on the back, and then they turned to gaze upon the undying wonder of the fall, and the dissolving rainbows which rose from the pool below.

Ming was a man of quick and fervent enthusiasms: he had gone out to scoff, he returned a devotee.

He and Dibble shouted to each other antiphonally all the way home. When the bottomless creek threatened a second time to swallow them up, they hardly ceased to gesticulate and to outdo one another in prophecy.

The wily bronchos thought they saw their opportunity. They jammed the buckboard against a stump and upset it, but Dibble hung like grim death to the lines, and Ming jumped up from the ground and ran to their heads. The front axle was sprung and a whiffletree cracked, but they tied the whole together with halter shanks and bits of wire, and continued rejoicing on their way.

It was close to midnight when they reached Gateway, and for what remained of the night, Thunder Falls and

Miss Seebright, and a Gateway great and beautiful and prosperous, were all mixed up together in Ming's head, and would not let him sleep.

"The bug's bitten you," said Curtis, "you're gone. I'm sorry it had to be you, but now we will have a boom. You've got to have somebody who really believes in it: none of the gang have up to now. They just came to skin suckers. And the old-timers sat tight and got what they could out of it."

"You never saw the Falls," countered Ming. "None of these other fatheads have either. I've seen 'em. Dibble wants to call a public meeting, and I'm going on the platform with him. I never did any public speaking yet, but I can get up and tell 'em what I saw."

"Go to it," said Curtis. "But if you want anybody to listen, for the Lord's sake tell Finny to cut it short."

Miss Seebright came in, late as usual, and Ming turned to her eagerly, trying to kindle in her an answering fire.

"Will you make much money out of it?" she queried.

"Well, no-o, not directly anyhow, but see what a thing it is for the town. It'll bring thousands of people in: big factories, you know, and railways."

"And Duke'll sell 'em a lot of real estate," put in Curtis with a thin smile.

She gave a little laugh. "Oh, I see. I see now."

Ming was conscious of a chill. Was this mercenary outlook proper in the ideal woman? He had not been thinking of himself at all, being rapt in visions of a great and shining city whereof he would be a master builder. But it is for men to have visions: for women to profit by them.

He went out and flung himself upon Borowdell and Kenkenake, and poured burning words upon Oppenshaw and Little Willie and Whittaker and Ham Woffin, and anyone else who would listen to him. They did not take fire at once, but his white-hot enthusiasm scorched them a little, and here and there he planted a smouldering spark. At least they agreed to attend a public meeting.

At lunch he asked Miss Seebright if she would come.

"You'd better take your other girl," she said, with a hint of acid in her tone.

"What other girl?"

"The one you were with on Tuesday night."

"O-oh, you mean Merry Oliveau. Why, she's only a kid, she's my landlady's youngest daughter. I take her about a bit because there's nothing else for me to do in the evening. I don't fancy loafing about bars and getting squiffy."

He perceived with deep inward joy that she was jealous. It meant that he had made more progress in her regard than he had ventured to hope. She sat with her face half-turned from him, looking disdainful and at the same time unhappy.

"I'm lonely as the devil in the evening," he pleaded. "I can't see that there would be the least objection to your coming out with me. After all, it isn't as if I were married or a known bad character."

"Don't let's talk about it," she said hurriedly.

"Well, but won't you let me take you to the meeting?"

"I don't know. You can call for me and I'll let you know then."

Four melancholy spruces marked the gate of the house where she boarded with a Mrs. Hope. He found her there.

"I just came to tell you I couldn't come out," she said.

"But you have your hat and coat on."

"Yes, I was going, but I thought I'd better not."

"But why not?"

"I don't know who'll be there; it might be only men."

"If there are, I'll bring you back. Please come, Miss Seebright, the meeting's due to start in fifteen minutes."

"Well, all right, if you're sure there's no harm in it."

He had to reassure her all the way, and she was on the point of turning back several times, but they arrived. There were forty-nine people present in the council chamber of the city hall, where the meeting was held. Most of them were real estate men, but Ming was gratified to see Duncan Acland, his wife, and several other old-timers and their womenfolk. Dibble had managed to persuade them, and many of them were well-to-do.

With rare self-denial, Dibble limited himself to a speech of only fifty minutes' duration. Ming's turn came. His knees were quaking, his neck had grown so stiff he had difficulty in turning his head, and his throat was dry and constricted. He cast a despairing look at Miss Seebright, and she answered him with an encouraging smile.

He gave an explosive cough and plunged breathlessly into his subject. In his haste, he tried to say several

words at once and choked. He snatched a glass of water and spilled some of it. Suddenly his stage fright left him. He had a vision of Miss Seebright's face shining mistily through the descending curtain of Thunder Falls, and addressed himself to the vision.

He became aware that his audience had stopped coughing and shuffling, and were listening to him. He paused, and received a patter of applause. He launched forth more boldly, choosing his words, driving home his points, and felt their sympathies reaching out to him. Thrilled with a delicious consciousness of power, he unleashed his peroration, and ended abruptly.

Silence, and then applause strong and genuine.

"And now," he said, "we have to get an expert to tell us what it will cost. I'll give fifty dollars towards getting one here. How many good citizens of Gateway, how many who believe in the future of their town, will join me?"

Huck Borowdell was up, vociferating, "Mr. Chairman, I move we form a Thunder Falls Development Association, supported by voluntary contributions. I have fifty dollars to chip in too."

"I shecond 'at moshum," rumbled Ham Wofflin, vast and half-drunk, lifting himself with difficulty to his feet. "Fif-y good dollarsh here."

The association was formed on the spot, the boomsters contributing with the lavishness of their kind. The old-timers either held out vainly for a dollar membership fee, or fled from the hall, Acland being the first to go.

Dibble was elected president upon Ming's nomination, he himself secretary, and Borowdell treasurer.

The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to Dibble, gracefully proposed by Curtis. The old man, much moved, launched into another patriotic paean in praise of the British Empire and Thunder Falls, but was silenced by the singing of God Save the King.

Ming elbowed his way through the chattering crowd to Miss Seebright's side.

CHAPTER VII

MING was bubbling with joy. As they walked along together he effervesced, "I knocked 'em, what?"

She looked up with unusual animation. "It was fine, Mr. Ming, I wanted to holler. I most clapped my hands off."

"It'll be a great thing for the town," he exulted.

"You'll make a pile of money out of it," she replied wistfully. "It's so miserable to be poor. I hate it."

"Poor kiddie," he said tenderly. "I suppose it does come harder on a girl to be poor."

"It's awful, it's—it's hellish," she said with extraordinary vehemence.

The short summer night was at its darkest, the scattered houses were blank and silent. He had never been so much alone with her, so close to her, for her shoulder rubbed against his arm on the narrow plank walk. He plunged impetuously.

"Miss Seebright, will you marry me? I—I could make things easier for you. I'm not really a bad fellow, you know. I haven't made much money, but I will now. Anyhow I could make it much easier for you. I can't expect you to care for me as I do for you, but I think, perhaps, if you accepted me, I could make it, you know, so that you wouldn't regret it."

She had made a half-impatient, half-distasteful movement with her shoulders when he began to speak, but she continued to walk straight on without replying.

"Please, Miss Seebright," he begged.

She gave a hard quick shake of her head and quickened her pace.

"Have I offended you?"

She began to cry with little sobs and faint birdlike noises. Her feet stumbled on the uneven planks, and he put out his hands and caught her. She let herself sink back against him, lying passively in the curve of his arm with her face toward his shoulder. He could see the curve of her cheek and the gleam of a tear. Murmuring inarticulate endearments he bent and kissed the corner of her mouth, wet and salty with weeping.

Having begun, he kissed her several times with increasing passion. She acquiesced in silence, moving slightly so that she fitted more snugly into his embrace. He felt the soft resilience of her breast against his side.

"Well, are you going to marry me?" he asked at last.

"I suppose so," she sighed.

"Don't be mournful about it, sweetheart. I'll work myself to the bone to make you happy. Do you know, I don't even know your Christian name yet? I know your initials are M. A., but does the M. stand for Mary or Martha or Margaret?"

"Mattie, Mattie Annabel."

"It's a beautiful name, a lovely name. And when will you marry me, Mattie, darling? Soon, eh?"

But that seemed to strike a discordant note. She disengaged herself hastily.

"No no, not soon. Some day maybe, I don't know. I better be going in now ; it's late, and Mrs. Hope won't like it."

She began to walk on very fast. He overtook her with a stride, and put his arm round her waist.

"All right, honey lips, don't get frightened. But naturally I want you as soon as I can get you."

"Yes, yes, I want you to want me, but don't pester me about marrying you. Give me a little time to think."

They halted under the four melancholy spruces. There was no more of interest said, merely broken words of endearment from him and small soft noises from her. There was passion in her kisses, and happiness in her little trills of laughter. Then she broke away.

"No, no, no, no more to-night," she said decisively. "I must go in now. Good night."

"Good night, dearest darling."

He strode away at a terrific pace, repressing a wild desire to throw back his head and bay his triumph to the stars. Then came the revulsion.

"Well, I've gone and done it now. What the deuce, what the deuce . . ."

No man seriously contemplates marriage for the first time with equanimity. The very word chills, like the words "jail" or "grave". There is an irrevocability about it. True, most men are young and in love at the time : a man not in love has no excuse for committing matrimony.

Though he dwelt on Mattie's manifold perfections ; though the remembrance of her kisses was sweet upon his lips ; though the perfume of her breath was in his nostrils, and the dove-notes of her voice in his ears ;

though she satisfied the desire of his eye, and the need within him to protect and cherish; yet he was not happy.

"And yet I don't want to back out," he mused, measuring the hopelessness of his plight.

Mattie was even later than usual at the office in the morning, and Ming had time for a word with Curtis. He was a little afraid of the American's morning mood, but he felt the need to be frank. He was not a dissimulator by nature; he could lie on occasion with grace and breadth of conception, but it was beneath him to lie to a friend.

"Well, you old Yankee misogynist," was his greeting, with a forced laugh.

Curtis nodded. "I see," he said gravely. "Well, some men seem happier married, God alone knows why. When's it going to be?"

"Don't know."

"Get it over with, boy. You won't be able to get down to real work until you do, and this old boom's chirking up."

They discussed the matter. Curtis made no biting remark; his attitude suggested that a friend for whom he had a high regard had got himself into serious trouble. He sympathized sincerely, but there was nothing he could do. All men pity a man about to be married, most of all those who have been married themselves.

Mattie came in. She was pale, and there was a blurred look about her fine eyes that indicated recent tears. She kept her glance downcast and Ming could not get a look from her. She replied to Curtis with a mere murmur.

The American gave Ming a long look, his fine brows knotted, but no trace of cynical amusement on his face. With a jerk of his head in the girl's direction he got up and went out.

Ming flew to her side. "What's the matter, darling?"

"Nothing, nothing." She brought out a filmy little rag and dabbed her eyes.

"Don't cry, sweetheart, for God's sake. What have I done?"

"Nothing at all, it's all my fault. I shouldn't have said I'd marry you."

"Mattie, look at me. What have I done?" He was bewildered. "Can't you tell me what's wrong?"

She could not or would not. She had succeeded in driving him to the verge of distraction, when there came an interruption.

"Hello, hello, what's goin' on here?"

Ming swung to confront Borowdell, grinning, jovial and noisy. A furious look had no effect upon him whatever.

"Quit scrappin' with the steno or she'll jump her job, and good stenos are hard to get. Listen, I want to talk about Thunder Falls."

"To the devil with Thunder Falls."

"Now, now, don't talk wild. I know what you need. You been on the water wagon too long and it's soured you. Come on up to the St. Jo's; the boys are all there waitin' for you, an' they want to get down to business. Can't let any grass grow under our feet in this thing."

Ming came. To drive Borowdell out of the office would only compromise Mattie, and the pest would inevitably be back again in a few minutes with a gang

of grinning confederates. The boomster talking gaily on the way to the hotel, disregarding the stormy silence of his companion.

"Great speech you made last night ; it fetched 'em. Some spell-binder you are—ought to go into politics. If only the half of it was true, you got this town up an' comin', well, I guess. We'll have a real boom in Gate-way now—had to have something to tie to ; just peddlin' a little real estate back an' forth wouldn't get us any place."

Ming had recovered his outward equanimity by the time they turned in at the swing-doors. He was at once surrounded by a noisy crowd, full of congratulations and questions and wild and nebulous suggestions.

This was something he could understand ; here was firm ground under his feet, not the treacherous bog of a woman's emotions. He was soon able to dismiss Mattie as a puzzle for future solution, and give his thought to the matter before him.

He was in a better and more buoyant humour when he returned to take Mattie to lunch. She had regained her calmness, but was no less baffling.

"I don't want to talk about it," she said firmly.

"But, my God, girl, we've got to talk about it. A thing can't end like this, it's gone too far. What are you going to do ?"

"I don't know, I suppose I could go away."

"Mattie, don't talk like that. Of course you mustn't go away. But what made you change your mind since last night ?"

"I didn't change my mind—I knew I couldn't marry you,"

"Oh." Ming tugged at his big nose and stared blankly.

"I know what you're going to say," she cried, "but it isn't that at all."

He shook his head. "I wasn't going to say anything. Matter of fact, I don't know what the devil to say. But what——"

She interrupted him with a passionate waving of both hands. "No, no, no, don't say it, don't say anything. I know, and I won't tell you, and it's no use. I've got some letters to get out, and I must get back or Mr. Curtis will be mad."

He sighed deeply. "I can't understand, I can't make head or tail of you. Come out with me to-night, and we'll talk this thing over sensibly."

"No, I won't, I can't. It's no use your asking, because I can't."

She insisted on returning at once to the office, and Ming was claimed to attend another meeting of the Thunder Falls Development Association. It was noisy, confused and protracted. Dibble made three separate attempts to deliver his great oration, and was with difficulty restrained. As secretary, Ming was commissioned to write to a certain consulting engineer whose genius for self-advertisement had made him widely known.

Mattie had gone when he returned, and Curtis looked at him with a troubled eye. "Don't get so het up, boy," he urged gently. "It's always that way with a woman: if there isn't any trouble she starts some just to make it interesting. It'll come out all right, you see."

Somewhat cheered, but still in a state of considerable emotional upheaval, Ming walked past the four

spruce trees three times in succession that evening. Since Mattie had forbidden it, he did not go up and knock, but he had a strong hope that she would see him and relent. It is scarcely to be doubted that she did see him, but she refrained stubbornly from showing herself.

"I'll go up town and get filthily drunk," he decided sombrelly. "She doesn't care, or she wouldn't treat me like this."

But he did not carry out his highly justifiable resolution. He found himself instead so extremely disinclined for company that he strolled until late along the banks of the Sweetwater, a sheet of polished ebony reflecting the stars in little golden arabesques. He went home at last firmly resolved to have an explanation from Mattie.

A man's firmest resolutions are not much help to him in dealing with a woman. Mattie was simply unapproachable. She came to lunch with him, only to sit dumb through his pleas, shaking her head mutely at intervals. He did not go near the office all afternoon, and set out recklessly that evening to attend a stag party at the St. Jo's.

That is, it was to have been a stag party, but somehow plump Julie made her way into it. Then red-headed Minnie, who had danced down the corridor on his first night at the hotel; but it was chilly that evening, and she kept her clothes on. Lastly a new girl with dark curly hair and an interesting squint, whom they called Peachy.

Ming was in a reckless mood, and did not trouble to juggle his drinks. Peachy singled him out for attention,

and he kissed her. The whole thing might have developed into a thoroughgoing orgy if Ham Wofflin had not become pugnacious. He made a rush at Little Willie and fell over a chair. His roars brought Mike up from below, and broke up the party. Ming took a sudden dislike to the clinging Peachy, shook her off, and walked unsteadily home.

Mrs. Oliveau, with motherly tenderness, helped him to his room and took his boots off for him. He apologized to her.

"Go to bed, that's a good boy," she returned soothingly. "You'll be all right in the mornin'. Exactly."

He was always very morose following the rare occasions on which he took a drink too much, and he felt that Mattie had treated him badly. He all but scowled at her when she arrived. Business took one of its little spurts that day, and he was busy with Kenkenake until nearly two o'clock on a fairly large deal by which they split a comfortable commission.

"Been to lunch?" he inquired perfunctorily of Mattie.

"I'm not going to make any excuses," he thought rebelliously. "I don't have to feed her every day."

She nodded without a word and went on typing. So he went off to lunch by himself and felt very lonely and unhappy: it was better even to be quarrelling with Mattie than not to see her across the table at all.

Borowdell detained him after that. He had with him a young man with a sleek round head and a voice that was alternately very boyish and very gruff. He represented himself as interested in securing power from Thunder Falls for some vague industry, and was

voluble but not explicit. Nothing of value emerged from a long discussion, but all three felt that they had somehow been doing something progressive in a big business way, a nebulous and exalted feeling that always permeates booms.

Curtis was out, and Mattie was getting ready to go when he drifted into the office. She had hardly been in his mind all the afternoon, but sight of her set off a new emotional explosion.

"Mattie, why on earth can't you tell me what's the matter?"

Tears began to roll down her cheeks. "You don't care for me any more," she said in a stifled voice. "I don't matter, nothing matters. You don't love me."

He disregarded the window looking on the street and the passers-by, took her in his arms and drew her into the little room behind.

"Darling, darling, don't say such things. You know I love you; you know I'm just about dotty over you. Now tell me what's the matter."

"I can't tell you now," she replied obstinately, disengaging herself. "Somebody might come in. Come around to the house after supper. Now let me go. No, I won't let you kiss me. Not now. Somebody might see, and—I don't want to."

He had to let her go, but he was at her door in a fever of impatience by seven. She kept him waiting twenty minutes, but at last they were walking out of town along the township road. The evenings were drawing in, and there was a hint of frost in the still air. The grass was growing tawny and tinges of gold showed among the poplar leaves.

"Let's sit down on this bank," suggested Ming.
"No mosquitoes to-night."

She sat down obediently and began to pick a sprig of late golden-rod to pieces, her head bent and her eyes hidden.

"Well, Mattie?"

"I don't know how to tell you. Perhaps I'd best not."

"But you must: it doesn't matter what it is, I still love you."

"My brother's in jail," she blurted out. "Now you know."

"In jail, what for?"

"The police were crooked. He got in with some men who were working some kind of crooked scheme—something about mines. Poor Joe didn't know—he thought it was straight. He was selling shares, and the other fellows hopped out and left him, and the police got him and put all the blame on him. So now he's in the pen down there."

"The pen?"

"The penitentiary."

Ming remembered the grim mass of red brick on the banks of the Sweetwater.

"They have some tough birds in that coop," Curtis had said. "Murderers and all sorts, long-term men."

The thought was chilling. He had consorted with men to whom thirty days in jail was no novelty, but that was simply for drunkenness or fighting on the street, and they remained good fellows. Felony was different.

"I'm sorry," he said lamely.

She put her hands to her face and spoke in a hopeless voice. "Now you don't want to marry me. I knew

you wouldn't. My folks are all dead, I have nobody but Joe, and he's in the pen, and everybody thinks they can look down on me."

The appeal was direct to all the chivalry in him. He put his arm about her bowed shoulders and drew her to him.

"Don't be silly, sweetheart; don't be silly. I don't care what your brother did, you haven't done anything, you poor kid. Nobody's going to look down on you while I'm about: I'll smash 'em on the jaw. Don't cry any more, darling; it's going to be all right. Give me a kiss; it's going to be perfectly all right."

She let herself sink back against him, and lifted her face and smiled through her tears.

The dusk deepened and the wind rose, blowing keenly from the north. The cold forced itself upon their absorption. She shivered. He lifted her to her feet and they walked slowly back, his arm about her waist and her head leaning against his shoulder. At intervals he would halt and kiss her. They began to pass houses, and she drew herself primly away.

"I'm hungry," she said in a childish tone. "I couldn't eat all day thinking of you."

"Poor baby," he babbled, "poor pretty sweetness. Starvum to deff, eh? We'll toddle into old Li Wong's and get some slap-up tucker. We'll scoff, as they say in Jo'burg. Never been in Jo'burg? Long way from here, bestest belovedest, way down under. Lively town, Jo'burg, ja, ja."

"And I suppose you used to take girls to supper there too."

He looked down his long nose at her. It occurred to him that she was showing jealousy early, and he

remembered a girl in Buenos Ayres whose jealousy had run to knives. He had left for Valparaiso on her account. Meanwhile Mattie was waiting suspiciously for an answer to her question.

"You're the first girl I ever loved," he said diplomatically. It was true in a sense: she was the only girl he had ever wished to marry.

Whether she believed him or not, she gave his arm a grateful little squeeze, and they had a most delightful supper together in a curtained box. The benign Li Wong looked in, smiled upon their reconciliation, and suggested an improvement to the meal. It was midnight when they finally parted, with many endearments, under the sentinel spruces.

As he walked homeward, though, the thought of her incarcerated brother came up in Ming's path like a ghost. We do not instinctively believe in the innocence of anyone in prison, and he was sadly convinced that Joe Seebright was a rascal. It was perhaps disloyal to Mattie, but he hoped that Joe had drawn a good long sentence.

How seldom it is that a wife's relatives display any qualities one can view with anything but repulsion.

Then he became maudlin over Mattie. "The poor brave kid. All alone in the world. She might have married me without telling me anything about it. A man would be a cur not to go through fire for a girl like that. I'm going to make up to her for all the misery she's endured."

"Well, I'm glad to see that old grin working again," said Curtis in the morning. "Fixed it up, eh? Well,

now you'll have to get down to brass tacks. Don't think for a minute that a wife's going to be satisfied with the simple life; it's only lucky bachelors can enjoy that. When a woman isn't hollering her head off for money she bawling for more money."

An answer came from the great self-advertising consulting engineer. He would arrive shortly to inspect Thunder Falls. The *Daily Banner* devoted a whole page to Thunder Falls, and the *Weekly News* printed a smudgy cut of Niagara. The sensitive boom woke up and cut a few mild capers, and Curtis left liquor alone for five days.

Ming bought Mattie a diamond engagement ring with his commissions, and was rewarded by seeing her eyes glisten.

"Do you think Mr. Curtis would give me an afternoon off, Bert?" she inquired.

She had rejected Duke and had, so to speak, renamed him for her own uses.

"What for, priceless?"

"I want to go and see poor Joe. He can only have visitors once in two months, and the time comes round the day after to-morrow."

Her devotion to her brother was creditable and touching, but Ming wished devoutly that poor Joe had been sentenced to be hanged and the sentence promptly carried out.

"Oh, I guess Hank won't object. He'll say it's just like a woman."

"Bert, I don't like him."

"Why, has he been rude to you?"

"No-o," she admitted reluctantly, "he's always very polite. But he's so cold; he looks at me like I was something in a cage."

Ming laughed indulgently. "He's a funny old josser. He's afraid of women, and so he calls himself a woman-hater."

"And you don't hate women?"

Ming stiffened warily. "Well, there's one woman I adore: I can do without the rest."

"Bert, you do say the sweetest things sometimes."

"Always anxious to please, darling. But, I say, how're you going to get down to that—er—place?"

"I thought perhaps you'd drive me."

"And do you want me to go in with you?"

"No, no, no," she replied hastily. "I don't think they'd let you in anyway."

He breathed a sigh of relief. A man seldom desires closer acquaintance with the relatives of his wife-to-be, even when they are not in jail.

"I think I could manage that easily enough. I'll borrow Curtis' car."

He picked her up on the following afternoon where the town faded out in a sprinkling of half-breed log shanties, and dropped her at the frowning gate in the high wall. He came back two hours later and found her just emerging. She had been weeping, and was still dabbing her eyes. He helped her in, and presently she brightened up and began to laugh.

"Well, he said I could marry you," she said. "I had an awful time with the poor boy. He wasn't looking very well: it's shame the way they treat him. They won't even let him have a newspaper, and he wanted to

know about all what horses won what races, and I couldn't tell him, and he was mad. But how would I know?"

"All the winners," murmured Ming. "And what objection had he to me?"

"I'm coming to that. He wasn't going to have me married at all, but I told him I had no money, and had to work so hard, and had such a mean boss, and then I cried. Joe can't bear to see me cry. I can always get anything I want by bawling. And I bawled like everything, and told him how good you were to me, and showed him my ring, and then bawled some more and said I'd drown myself. So then he gave in."

"I'd like to know what business it is of his."

"Oh, you don't understand. I'm all he's got, and we've always been together, and he don't think anybody else can take right care of me."

"He isn't taking much care of you just now."

"Oh, you mustn't say that, Bert. I won't have it. I'll be mad."

"How long's he in for?"

"Poor Joe, it'll be nearly three years more, even if he gets time off. It's an awful long time. I don't know how he'll stand it. He looked awful with his face so pale and his hair cut off."

Ming reflected that much might happen in three years: he and Mattie might be far away before Joe emerged: Joe might not survive his incarceration. He did not speak his thoughts aloud, but they enabled him to sympathize with her more sincerely.

The great consulting engineer, Mr. Dyke Flanneler, arrived. He was an imposing figure, very tall, very broad,

very deep-chested, with an egg-shaped head broad at the base, and rising to an extremely high and narrow peak, sparsely thatched with greying hair.

He had a resonant voice and a rolling laugh, a forced and ferocious joviality, and he would shake hands with any number of people at any time. He had the makings of a politician, but too much intelligence to descend so low.

"Good day, sir," he boomed at Dibble. "Pleased to meet you. And these gentlemen. A forward-lookin' bunch, real Westerners. Bound to put their town on the map. Progress, progress. Hrmph-hrmph."

They had ready for him a team of horses and a democrat. Dibble went along with him as guide.

He was away the best part of three days. It is true that he spent in all more than twelve hours in the muskeg, and regrettably escaped drowning by a narrow margin, but he spent the whole of one day actually at the Falls. He measured their height, and estimated with an omniscient eye the amount of water that flowed over them daily.

He took a number of photographs, and returned to Gateway in complete possession of all the necessary facts. He was tendered a dinner by the Thunder Falls Development Association, and made a rousing speech.

"One of the finest propositions, gentlemen, one of the very finest propositions I ever looked into. You have a good thing there if it's handled progressively."

He promised them a written report in due time, collected a fat fee, and Gateway never saw him again. It was his modest habit never to linger upon the scene of his triumphs. People are fickle, and in after days

there were many in Gateway who had cheered him who would gladly have put a rope about his neck.

The Thunder Falls Development Association, with commendable enterprise, approached the Dominion Government for assistance in developing power. But it was not near election time, and Western votes were not particularly valuable. The real voting strength of the party then in power lay in the East, and if any money was to be squandered it could be done more profitably there.

The Association received gracious permission to carry out the work at its own expense, and its feelings were somewhat damped. The boom rather languished.

"Well, priceless one, when are we going to get married? I've pouched a few commissions lately, why delay?"

"Where'll we get married, Bert?"

"I was brought up Church of England myself. But if there's any particular brand you fancy . . ."

"Oh, that would be toney, Bert, just like real society people."

He winced. Sometimes she jarred on him, but he forgave her, for, after all, she was merely a Western barbarian.

She chattered on, "My folks was old line Baptists, and my dad was awful strict. You couldn't have any fun ever when he was around. No, I'd just love to get married by a preacher in a white nightshirt. I saw a high-class wedding once. I wish I could have a wedding like that, with maids of honour and flower girls, and orange blossoms and a veil, and a carpet, a red carpet

from the church to the sidewalk, and you in a plug hat and tail-coat. White gloves, I'm just crazy about white gloves."

Dearly as he loved her, her ideas did not appeal to him. A formal wedding seemed to him, as to most prospective bridegrooms, an ordeal of peculiar horror and ignominy.

"I'm not going to be sacrificed on any high altar to music," he said grimly. "We'll have a quiet wedding."

"Yes, I'm afraid we couldn't work it," she agreed ruefully. "But it would be dandy, wouldn't it?"

"I'd sooner be butchered in a Roman amphitheatre. But, never mind that. Name the day, queen of adorability, say when."

"I don't know. Will we go on a honeymoon? Would you take me out to the Coast? Or New York? I'd just love to see New York. Would you, Bert?"

"What do you think I am, heavenly one, a bloated plutocrat or a Russian Grand Duke? We might take a run down to Winnipeg. If we went much further we'd have to walk back."

"Yes, I'd like a trip to the 'Peg, but I wish we could go further. Isn't it hateful being poor? But if the boom gets going and you make a pile, we can go to California for the winter, can't we?"

"Later on, priceless, later on."

"Yes, I mean, but it's too bad we can't go any further than the 'Peg. And, my land, what am I going to wear? I haven't a rag. I'd sooner die than be married in these clothes, and they're the best I have."

"Would you let me give you fifty dollars?" he suggested.

But she had no false delicacy. "Make it a hundred, Bert; be a good sport. You don't know what it costs to get a girl's clothes."

"It's looks as as if I was on my way to find out," he grinned. "But how much money are we going to have left to set up housekeeping with?"

"Oh, I don't know. I never bother about money. Joe always said I wasn't to be trusted with a nickel. I always spend every cent I can get my hands on, so don't say I didn't warn you."

"Well, sweetheart, if we're going to honeymoon in Winnipeg, and then set up our own little home, I'm afraid you'll have to make fifty dollars do or drop the honeymoon."

"Oh no, I must have my honeymoon, every girl has that. Why——" She checked herself and changed the subject quickly. "I'll make fifty do, honey? Can I have it now?"

"And we can get married next week, darling?"

"Yes, yes. How much can you give me now, Bert?"

His pockets yielded twenty dollars and some small change. She appropriated the bills and kissed him warmly.

"I know just the loveliest little pair of shoes down in O'Leary's window," she said dreamily. "And there's the most wonderful hat in Mrs. Popham's. When can I have the other thirty?"

"I'll give it you to-morrow."

"You are a dear. I'll always love you if you give me lots of money."

As he mooned homeward he sought to find excuses for her rather startling rapacity.

"She's such a sweet, innocent little thing. And she trusts me so absolutely. I ought to be proud that she'll take money from me. Yes, that's it; she's never had any upbringing. Oh, well, these conventions are all rot anyhow, why shouldn't I give her money? She's not like one of these pick-up wenches who'll go through your pockets at a moment's notice. She's pure gold."

In the morning he gave her thirty dollars, and she promptly asked for an hour off to go and get some things. Curtis gave Ming a quizzical glance, but said nothing. She was back just in time to go to lunch, her arms full of parcels.

"Well, I spent every cent," she informed her lover, "but I didn't get half what I wanted. I couldn't think of asking you for any more, could I?"

"Perhaps you'd better not think about it for a bit," he said gently, as one would speak to a child.

"Oh, all right, I won't."

But there was a suggestion of a pout, and she was quite silent for the rest of the meal, and when he went to call for her that evening she refused to come out.

"No, I don't feel like it. I don't think I should."

"What's the matter now?"

She let her eyelids droop, and her face expressed saintly sadness and resignation. "I think we've made a mistake. I think we've both made a mistake. No, don't come near me; you'd better go back to your other girl."

"Oh, my God, what other girl? I haven't any other girl. Mattie, you're enough to drive a man dotty."

"I can't help it if you're tired of me," she said pathetically.

"Will you please explain yourself? I don't know how often I've told you there's no other girl."

"Then what's this?" she said accusingly, and produced a letter. "That tells the whole story."

"Who wrote it?"

"She didn't sign her name, but it's enough for me."

"An anonymous letter, eh? Let's see it."

It was a half-sheet of cheap letter-paper scrawled all over. It was with difficulty he deciphered it:

"Beware!! He has trifled with a virtuous young girls heart. I wish you NO harm but his honey promises were whispered to me before you. Take CARE!!!"

"Some lunatic all right, or some blasted practical joker," he growled. He examined the envelope. "Why, you must have had this for a couple of days, it's post-marked the 28th."

"I didn't get it until yesterday, and I didn't pay any attention to it. Only now, of course, it must be cleared up."

"But you know this is all nonsense, Mattie."

"Perhaps it is, I'm not saying anything about it. I'll never mention it again; but with this thing between us, we can't go on."

"Why in Heaven's name not?"

She repeated with the same martyred air, "Not with this thing between us."

"Give it me, I'll find out who sent it. Then perhaps you'll believe me."

"I do believe you, but . . ." She sighed deeply.

"Oh, please leave me now. I can't bear any more."

He went home raging. When he walked into the house, Merry Oliveau looked up from a book, which she quickly slid under a cushion.

"Home early to-night, Duke; had a scrap with the girl?"

A deep suspicion shot into his mind. He had been vaguely suspecting Mrs. Midger or one of the girls at the St. Jo's. He had dismissed the idea of a masculine practical joke. Perhaps, though, Merry's innocent-seeming question had a meaning behind it.

He looked at her hard. "Have you been up to any devilry? You look too saintly to be natural."

She began to giggle. "I haven't been doin' anything, just readin' this book." She held up the volume, *Famous Sorceresses of Love*, and giggled again. "Ma an' Jo's out, an' I snooped around until I found it. Ma'd raise the devil: she thinks I'm too young, but Jo reads this kind of stuff all the time."

"You'll come to a bad end, young woman. And is that all you've been up to?"

"Honest to God, Duke; what's eatin you?"

"Somebody's been playing a dirty trick on me, Merry, perfectly putrid trick. Sending Miss Seebright anonymous letters."

"Oh, Duke, you don't think I'd be as mean as that. Let me see the letter, have you got it?"

He handed it to her. She gave it a glance, and broke out vehemently, "Oh, dern her, dern her, doin' it again. She must be crazy."

"Who?"

"Jo. She wrote that, that's her writing. She's bughouse."

"You mean your sister? But I never spoke ten words to her. I thought she didn't like me."

Merry shrugged her shoulders. "She's crazy about fellers, we can't keep a roomer. This ain't the first time she sent one of them 'nonamous letters."

"Well, I'll be damned."

"Please, Duke, don't tell ma, it'd worry her. She thinks a heap of Jo and her singin' and all. I'll jack Jo up to-night; tell her you're goin' to have her pinched an' put in the coop if she don't leave your girl be. I'll scare her plenty, but don't tell ma, will you?"

"All right, Merry, but you tell your sister that this kind of thing leads to penal servitude for life, and that I only refrained from prosecution at your intercession."

"Wait till I get that by heart, Duke; it'll make her sit up an' take notice. All right, you go tell your girl it's all hunky-dory, eh?"

Mattie accepted his explanation. "I knew all along there was nothing in it," she said calmly.

"Then why did you raise such a dust?"

"Oh, I don't know. I was sore at you, you were being mean to me."

"I fail to see it. In what way?"

"Oh, you were calling me down about spending all that money, and I'm not married to you yet, and I won't be bawled out until I am. See?"

He thought it wisest to let the matter drop: argument was not likely to get him anything but more trouble.

They went to St. Sylvester's Anglican Church on the following Sunday morning. The building was rather

bare, but the service awoke old associations in Ming's mind, and the Rev. Silas Hoddenway was a reconciliation and a solace. He had a pale ascetic face, and possessed the Oxford accent in its purity.

Ming fell into a reverie. He was once more a little boy, sitting by his father's side in the old oak pew, black with age, in a dim and musty fourteenth-century church.

Those had been great days, before the advent of a vixenish stepmother and the three poisonous little half-sisters who had followed in due course. He disliked thinking of his stepmother, and made haste to put her out of his mind. He had long forgiven his father his second marriage : the poor man had suffered enough for his folly.

He went back to the earlier and brighter days, when he was always trotting by his father's side on his short legs, reaching up to clasp the big but gentle hand that swung him so lightly over puddles. He woke with a start to find the service over.

" Well, I liked it," said Mattie. " But they do hop up and down so. Did you see the hat Mrs. Oven had on ? And that woman in black and green, wasn't she a terror ? "

" I didn't notice. I've stopped looking at other women since I saw you."

" Bert, you can say the nicest things."

" Glad you appreciate my efforts. And now, about that wedding ? "

" Oh, Bert, I simply can't ! I haven't half enough things. And the awful prices. I got a pair of six-dollar shoes and they don't fit. Isn't that terrible ? "

" Why not change 'em ? "

"Oh, I couldn't do that. I just love them, and I can wear them too, only they hurt my feet so. But I could wear them for putting on style."

He frowned, but she reached up with a pink fingertip and stroked his brows.

"Now, don't be mad at me, Bert. I can't bear it. I'm really and truly doing the best I can. I said I would marry you as soon as I got my things, didn't I? but how can I when I haven't any money?"

"Hm."

There was no one in sight. She nestled close to him.

"Don't you love me a little bit, Bert? Put your arms around me and tell me you do. Tighter. I'm going to tell you something." She pulled his head down and whispered in his ear, "I love you."

Ming was not unaware that he was being fooled: men are not altogether so simple as women imagine; but if a woman be not permitted to make a fool of her lover, she is being unjustly deprived of an immemorial right.

He was able to give her some money in the morning, and when he called that evening he found her in a very sweet temper.

"Yes, honey, I'm ready to get married now."

"All right, I'll get a marriage license, and we'll get old Hoddenway to marry us."

"Oh, I don't know; there isn't any real hurry. I haven't quite made up my mind."

"It takes you too long to make up your mind," he said grimly. "You're going to get married."

"All right," she agreed meekly. "You know, Bert, I hate making up my mind. Poor Joe used to say, I

hadn't any mind. He'd get mad sometimes and bawl me out something fierce because I didn't know what I wanted. But if you're in such a hurry, you'll have to give me another ten dollars. I simply can't bear that hat I got the other day."

CHAPTER VIII

THEY had gone together and bought the marriage license. Mattie had given her age as twenty, her birthplace as Toronto, Ontario, and had described herself as an orphan with no living relatives.

"I didn't want to tell everybody about poor Joe," she explained to Ming. "What's it matter, it's only one of those silly old government things?"

He wondered a little uneasily how many of her other answers were also untrue.

He had said good night to her under the melancholy spruces for what he fondly hoped was the last time, and was now taking his favourite stroll along the banks of the Sweetwater. The great river shone like tarnished silver, and a half-moon walked upon it in a wavering path of light.

His exultation flickered like a dying lamp and went out. Hitherto he had been confronting obstacles, spurred on by the apparent difficulty of obtaining his desire. Now had come time for reflection and the counting of the spoils: they did not seem so considerable.

The shades of his fathers, an innumerable army, pitiful and foreboding, surrounded him invisibly and spoke inaudibly to his troubled soul.

"We too were married," they sighed. "We too have clanked the chain and bowed our neck to the yoke.

We also have said good-bye to freedom. What shall it profit a man if he gain a woman and lose his own soul? We weep for you. Consider before it is too late."

His heart was like lead and there was cold sweat on his brow. He realized he was facing one of the two terrible dooms that menace man: death is certain, but the wise may escape marriage.

"She is different from other women," he cried desperately.

"They all are," sighed the chorus, "until you are married to them."

"I've given my word, and I can't back out now."

"Alas, then you have looked your last upon the sun, for he shines no more upon the married man. Shadow and bondage and sorrow unto the long-delayed mercy of death."

He went to bed very sorrowful.

He had to go through another harrowing experience before the final ordeal. While he was at breakfast, served by Merry, Mrs. Oliveau came in. She crossed her hands on her stomach, coughed and rolled her eyes.

"This is a happy day for you, Mr. Ming."

"Yes, Mrs. Oliveau."

"But not for everybody, Mr. Ming, not for everybody."

"I suppose not," he replied, somewhat mystified.

"My poor girl, Mr. Ming, my poor Jocelinda. These things happen you know, Mr. Ming. Exactly."

"I didn't know Miss Oliveau was ill," he replied politely.

Merry sniffed loudly. "Jo's puttin' on again. No more the matter with her than there is with me."

"Merinillia," said Mrs. Oliveau sharply.

"All right, ma, but you know how she is."

"Well, I don't," said Mrs. Oliveau helplessly. "She says she's sick, claims she's dyin'. You know, she always was kind of delicate, an' she does work up her feelin's so."

"I'm very sorry to hear it," said Ming, wondering if he was expected to postpone his wedding on Jo's account.

"Would you, Mr. Ming, would you go in an' say good-bye to her before you go?" asked Mrs. Oliveau breathlessly. "You would do her good. Just look in for a minute. Exactly."

"Why, certainly, Mrs. Oliveau."

Merry made a face at him behind her mother's back.

With strong reluctance he followed Mrs. Oliveau up the stairs and into the girls' room. Jocelinda's complexion struck him as the most unwholesome shade of green he had ever looked on. She lifted a thin hand and took his.

"It is not your fault," she said in a surprisingly deep voice. "There is nothing to forgive. Think of me sometimes when I am in my grave. Farewell."

She turned her face resolutely to the wall. The bewildered Ming saw two big tears rolling down Mrs. Oliveau's cheeks. In the most acute embarrassment he backed out upon the landing and ran into Merry.

"Bet she got that stuff out of a book," she whispered. "Isn't she a terror?"

He was now only too anxious to leave the house, though he was not due at the church for half an hour. He picked up his bag.

"Well, say good-bye to your mother for me, and tell her how I appreciate all her kindness," he said to Merry.

"Don't get excited about Jo," she besought him. "She's always cuttin' up like this. You ain't goin' away without givin' me a kiss, are you, Duke?"

She threw her arms round his neck. "I wish you was my feller too, but I'm not goin' to act foolish over it."

He kissed her affectionately. "You're a dear kid," he said, considerably moved.

He fled out of the house and down the street. It was a chilly morning, and the last golden leaves hung limply on the poplars under a blue-grey sky. He walked on down the street past St. Sylvester's until he saw Curtis' car coming. Curtis had been to pick up Mattie and Mrs. Hope, her landlady and only friend in the town.

"Jump in," he said gruffly. "Better be a little early than too late."

Ming saw that his temper was ruffled. As he climbed in beside him, the American grumbled in a low voice, "Damn women, never ready."

The Rev. Silas Hoddenway was waiting for them in the unheated church. He looked cold, his nose was blue and he had the snuffles. Mattie was calm and self-possessed. There was in her glance a gleam, the glitter in an eagle's eye when he stoops to the quivering rabbit. Ming's face was cadaverous, for he had slept

ill, and the incident of the morning had further upset him. A man who has been married will approach the gallows with a certain sense of familiarity.

Early as it was, three women had somehow found their way into the church. Women go to a wedding as wolves to a kill: it is another victory in their age-long campaign for the subjugation of man.

Curtis with funereal mien gave Mattie away. Mr. Hoddenway quacked, but even his utterance could not soften the terrible words of the marriage service, which fell upon Ming's ear like the knell of doom.

They arrived at the station to find the Winnipeg train panting at the platform, fretting to be off.

But the secret had leaked out. They were beset by a howling mob of boomsters, Oppenshaw and Kenkenake, Borowdell, Wofflin, Little Willie, Whittaker, Oakes, Rates, Minden, Linquit and half a score more. They flourished old shoes and hurled stinging volleys of rice and tossed confetti in the air.

Ming forgave them. They were a nuisance, but they really wished him well. It was a moment when the sympathy of his own sex had real value. The sympathy of the other sex is forever cut off when a man takes the fatal step; but men, comrades in the face of the deadly menace of the feminine, are loyal. From the dim dawn of time they have been the exploited victims and their hearts have been made tender by much suffering.

The conductor bawled, "Awwwll aboo-ard."

Breathless and laughing, they scrambled up into the Pullman and began to brush the rice and confetti from each other. The boomsters howled like wolves as the

train pulled out, and the gigantic mountebank Wofflin danced grotesquely on the platform.

Ming had time to look at his wife. He felt tender and possessive, and filled with a firm resolution to be a good husband to her. The ordeal of the wedding was over, the thing done, and he was not one to hold postmortems on what might have been. It did not seem difficult at the moment as she snuggled up to him and began to chatter unconcernedly.

Still, he had food for reflection. He was entering upon an unexplored country. He did not really know anything about women, beyond casual and fleeting contacts with such ladies as a sailor will meet in any port of call the world over. Their sole interest had lain in relieving him of his money, and his feeling had been one of disgust even while he trafficked with them.

He made a sharp distinction between them and *good* women. Of good women he had a highly idealized conception: they possessed all the virtues in a superlative degree. It was true he had not actually encountered any such perfect beings, but he had seen some whose beauty could only be the reflection of a speckless soul. He was anxious to believe that Mattie was such a one. He had never seen anyone lovelier, and her nature and intellect should be in keeping with her face. When any doubts appeared he crushed them sternly. At present he was much concerned to measure up to what would undoubtedly be her extremely rigid ideas of delicacy.

The train hammered and rattled over the uneven track. Here were vast wheatfields and great areas of

new breaking, but even a thousand-acre field was a mere speck on that unending plain. The scattered farm-houses looked unutterably forlorn and isolated under an intense blue canopy inhabited only by a bright but mild-rayed sun. The fields were covered with rows upon rows of stooks, save where chattering threshing rigs piled ragged heaps of straw.

The train halted at new villages, starting up out of the soil like weird fungoid growths. Probably no architecture on earth is so monotonously hideous in its utilitarian angularity as that of Western North America. It is not so much bad taste as an absolute lack of any taste at all. No tree had yet had time to grow, and it seemed not to have occurred to anyone to attempt even a flower garden. The whole was a fit hell of ugliness for the souls of damned artists.

They passed through Dogtown, merely ugliness on a larger and more imposing scale, but a thriving, bustling city, already far outstripping in population and wealth the ancient fur-trading post of Gateway.

The light faded and presently the porter made up the berths. The passengers in their narrow pens went through weird contortions like so many acrobats in training. A fat man could be heard wheezing, swearing and shedding buttons with sharp reports.

"Please, Bert," said Mattie appealingly.

"All right, darling, you can trust me."

In the morning they were approaching Winnipeg through a country long settled. The land itself remained flat and featureless, but there was almost continuous cultivation on both sides of the line, and the farmers had tried to relieve the deadly monotony by

planting belts of trees about their buildings. A diminishing perspective of obelisk-like grain elevators did something to break the skyline.

Then the sprawling buildings and wide and windy streets of the 'Peg, metropolis of the West. They registered at the Victoria Regia, a hotel of the better class; not one of the vermin-haunted dives that used to look out through their unwashed windows on Main Street.

For Mattie there were the theatres and the delights of spending all the money she could wheedle out of him; for him the experience of adjusting himself to a wife. He found her at once a wonder, an irritation and a delight. He was intensely interested in all she did, and puzzled himself trying to make out what she thought or whether she thought at all, which at times seemed doubtful.

In a moment of irritation he would ask himself, "What the devil did she do that for? What a half-witted flutter-bat she is."

Again, "Now what's she getting at? She has the cunning of the devil. I never know where to have her."

And yet again, "She's a perfect angel, I'm a lucky man. The best thing I ever did was to marry her."

He tried at the end of a week to sum up his impressions, and arrive at some sort of conclusion with regard to her.

"I suppose I'm disappointed, it's not what I expected. But what exactly did I expect? Damned if I know. She's reserved enough, and yet she's so

confoundedly matter-of-fact. She's easy enough to get along with—except when she isn't. I love her to distraction, and yet there are times when I could slap her silly. She's the world's most glorious angel, and yet she has more claws than a cat and more vices than a mule.

"I thought I knew quite a bit about women, quite a bit. I know a lot, I do—a man's education doesn't even begin until he marries. Just exactly what do I know about her? Well, I know that when she looks most like a suffering angel what she wants is food. After all, I suppose a man's first duty is to feed his wife. Well, she takes lots of feeding—ready to eat at any hour of the day or night. Still, she'll eat anything. It don't seem to matter to her how it's cooked, or if it tastes like a boiled dish-rag, as long as there's plenty of it.

"And she's so sweetly natural and spontaneous—and so cursedly matter-of-fact. That's it: there's no poetry in her. She inspires poetry in others, but she has none herself. She's just a supremely lovely animal—and yet. Perhaps she has a soul after all.

"Anyway, she's no plaster saint. Jove, my attitude towards her has changed a lot in a few days. To think I was ready to worship her as a sort of little god—yet I don't know that I don't rather prefer her just the way she is.

"She wants everything she sees, just like a baby or an ape, and yowls for it. If you get it for her she isn't interested. But she doesn't want anything she can't see or feel or taste—born materialist. No discussion of abstract ideals for her. When I try anything like that she gets bored or fretful—and I used to think we'd

talk about all things in heaven and earth, particularly heaven, and she'd sort of show me the way to it. I think somebody must be having a good laugh at my expense.

"She hasn't a speck of imagination, still I ought to be grateful for that probably: if she wanted everything she imagined as well as everything she saw, she'd keep me pretty busy. Thank the Lord, as soon as a thing is out of her sight she forgets about it—but she immediately starts to want something else.

"Oh well, I suppose a man shouldn't expect too much of a woman. Mattie's not so bad after all, and it's no use trying to decide whether I'm glad I married her or not. I am married to her, and I'll have to make the best of it. It mayn't be so very difficult after all."

Like most men who have knocked about the world, Ming had acquired methodical and orderly habits: it is only men who have been ruined by too much contact with the disorderly sex who are careless and slovenly. He liked to have his belongings each in its place, ready to hand at a moment's notice. Mattie's serene untidiness appalled him.

She had a habit of undressing while perambulating the room, letting her garments fall wherever she removed them. That was in the days when a woman wore as many layers of clothing as the heart of an onion. Her skirt on the foot of the bed, her shirtwaist on the dressing-table, a petticoat on the back of a chair, this thing here, that there. She invariably sat on the floor to take off or put on her stockings. Her abundant hair contained a bushel of hairpins that rattled down like hail during her toilette,

Dressing was with her an interminable business. After the first morning, Ming used to lie in bed and watch her with amused and wondering eyes. It took her anywhere up to an hour merely to dress herself and put up her hair. It took him eight minutes, including shaving.

As, for instance :

“ Where’s that blamed old stocking ? ”

She spoke in a voice between a whine and a snuffle, lying on her stomach on the floor, her head and one bare arm under the bed, and her pretty pink feet waving in the air. She looked childlike and somehow pathetic.

“ What are you whiffling about, old woman ? ”

“ I can’t find my stocking.”

“ Why don’t you put all your things in one place when you go to bed ? ”

“ It’s too much trouble. I can’t find that stocking, Bert, and I know I took it off right here last night. I always remember where I leave things.”

“ The old memory must be failing, precious. There’s a thing that looks like a stocking on the dressing-table.”

She backed out from under the bed. Her face was red and there was a dusty smudge on her nose, her hair was tousled. She looked more like a child than ever.

“ Aren’t you mean ? Why didn’t you say that before, now I’m all over dust ? ”

“ Now I know why you were always late at the office, young lady.”

“ Yes, it was awful ; it drove me nearly crazy. I never could find my clothes, and I used to come down

sometimes looking just terrible. I hate getting up in the morning, and now I'm married I don't have to, and I won't either until I want to."

"Who's going to get hubby his brekker?"

"Hubby's going to get his own and mine too," she flung back at him.

"Hm, I've a horrible suspicion that that's about what will happen."

She dragged him off to the stores, being dissatisfied with her hat. She tried on every hat in two large stores and bought nothing. Ming slunk out of the door ahead of her like a kicked dog; he was so ashamed he felt physically sick.

"If you play that trick again," he warned her, "I shall be reluctantly compelled to kill you, and I know the shopkeeper will back me up."

"Pooh, that's what they're there for; they've nothing else to do. And I'm not going to buy a hat I don't want. Let's go in here."

"I won't, damned if I do. I've lost my nerve. I'll wait outside and pick you up when they throw you out, and I won't blame them if they do."

Time passed, a great deal of time. He stood on the kerb and watched the traffic running wild on boundless Portage Avenue.

"What callous brutes women are," he reflected, "they never seem to have the least regard for the rights and feelings of other people, particularly other women. I wonder if it's just sheer bestial stupidity or deliberate cruelty?"

"Bert, come in here. I want you to see which hat you like best."

The hopeful look on his face faded; with bowed shoulders he followed her in. An elderly woman and two younger ones, all evidently bursting with repressed fury, stood in the midst of the store's entire stock.

"I can't make up my mind," said Mattie calmly. "See what you think of this?" She postured gracefully before him.

"Looks all right," he mumbled.

"Or this?"

"Don't see anything wrong with it."

"Or do you like this one better?"

"No, it's all right."

"I don't know. I like that little thing over there in the corner, but I don't know if it'd go with this dress."

Other customers came in, and postured before the glass, casting suspicious and malignant looks at one another. Mattie went on trying on hats and discarding them. Ming grew desperate.

"I don't know, I don't know," she moaned.

"Which do you like best?" he asked her at length, his jaw set and his eyes shining dangerously.

"I—I think that one. No, that one, that one."

"I'll take it," snapped Ming to the milliner. "How much."

He marched out of the store with his head up, the bag in his hand.

She tugged at his sleeve. "Mad at me, Bert?"

"Mrs. Ming, if I'd been that unfortunate woman I'd have taken my scissors and cut your throat. What heartless devils women are to each other."

She giggled. "If I was working in a store, she'd come in and do the very same thing to me."

At the hotel she had to try on the hat again. She knitted her brows and stuck out her lower lip.

"Bert," she coaxed, "I think I like that other one better, you know, the blue. Couldn't we take this back and change it?"

His ill-humour had passed. "Over my dead body, sweetheart, only over my dead body."

"Then I'll have to get another hat," she said with finality. "I hate this one."

He took his head in his hands. "Verily, verily, I am being punished for sins in a former life, or why should the gods have seen fit to afflict me with a congenital imbecile? Quem Jupiter vult perdere . . . I feel it coming on: I shall shortly run into the street and bite a policeman."

"Whatever for?"

"I want to give him hydrophobia."

"Oh, you're being funny. You might talk sense once in a while. I want to change this hat."

"Go ahead, go ahead, but I'm not coming with you. I can't face that woman. If you don't come back to tea, I'll send the undertaker round there and say no more about it."

"You're too silly."

She went out.

"I wonder why woman was created?" he mused. "Are the gods idiotic, or did they make her for a joke?"

The hat with which she reappeared seemed to him no better and no worse than the one she had taken away. But he held his peace, recognizing that no action of hers could be referred to any logical or masculine standard. She was feminine through and through, serenely obeying

the laws of her own being, and one submits with resignation to the vagaries of nature.

At the end of the tenth day he said to her, "Well, dear one, we're going home to-morrow."

"Oh, but I want to buy a pile of things yet."

"It's because you've bought so many things that we have to go, golden heart. Either we go by train to-morrow or we walk back, and it's a long, long way."

"Well, I've had a pretty good time," she said good-naturedly. "You're a dear hubby, but I wish we had some more money."

They reached Gateway at 11 p.m.

"Let's go to the St. Jo's for the night," said Mattie.

"Not if I know it."

"Afraid you'll meet some of your old girls?" she queried with a keen and suspicious look.

"Don't talk rot; the St. Jo's is no fit place for a decent woman. We'll go to the Gateway House; it's clean, anyhow."

"This is an awful dump after the Victoria Regia," she pouted, when they reached their room. "I wish we'd gone to the St. Jo's."

"Oh, dry up, Mattie, do dry up. I'm tired, and I have to get to work in the morning. I've a lot of leeway to make up."

"Now, you're tired of me," she whimpered. "You won't do anything to please me any more."

"Why do you want to start a fight for at this time of night?"

"I'm not starting a fight, you're being cranky and mean. I don't want to fight, but a person can't live with you and your temper. You fly off the handle at

the least little thing. I don't know why we can't go to the St. Jo's. I'm a married woman and I have my husband with me, and I've always wanted to stop at the St. Jo's and see what they do there. But you bring me to this dirty hole."

She fell asleep two hours later, too weary to scold any more. She was still wrapped in cherubic slumber when he rose and went down to get his breakfast.

CHAPTER IX

BUSINESS was bad and Curtis had been drinking again. His first words made this evident.

“ Oh, you did get back, what in hell for ? This town’s all shot to blazes. I’m getting out. Never saw such a crowd of deadheads in my life. I can stand for suckers, but cheap suckers, arrgh. There are just as many damn fools down in the States as up here, but a man will take a chance on his money down there ; these Canuck tightwads won’t part with a nickel until they can buy a dime with it.”

“ Seem to have rather a down on the land of the maple leaf, old man. Heard anything of Dyke Flanneler’s report yet ? ”

“ No, and won’t ; all that windbag is after is fees. He’s in the fairy-tale graft, and if he does send a report it won’t be worth the paper it’s written on. He’s a liar, he lies like a Congressman or a Member of Parliament, a natural born irreclaimable liar.”

“ Dearly beloved, the drought has been too prolonged. Let’s adjourn this commination service to the St. Jo’s.”

“ Nothing for a man to do in this stinking hole but get drunk,” grumbled Curtis. “ If a man ever gets sober enough to know where he’s at, he’s liable to go jump in the Sweetwater.”

Gloom pervaded the bar of the St. Jo's. The born boomster is of mercurial temperament, and without action and excitement he becomes panicky and depressed. Lots could have been bought cheap in Gateway that morning if anyone had had the courage to buy them in the prevailing atmosphere of discouragement.

They gathered round Ming and asked him, as Curtis had done, why he had returned to so forsaken a hole. They begged him to think of a new scheme for pricking the moribund boom into life.

"I can't think of anything but Thunder Falls," he confessed. "Just grit your teeth and hang on, dear friends, until old Flanneler makes his bally report. Gateway will yet hum with electricity, factories will be thicker than fleas on a dog."

"Bah," said Oppenshaw. "All together, boys, Bah!"

They all said it several times in chorus.

Then Borowdell bellowed, "Duke, you're a flop. Call yourself Duke of Gateway an' let the property get in this shape. You got to wash it out in whisky. We will all proceed to belly up now at Duke's expense."

"Once," agreed Ming, "but only once: honeymooning's expensive."

"Poor devil, he's right," sympathized one.

"Yes, he's fixed himself for fair," grinned Little Willie.

"Serve him right, a man of his age ought to know better," shouted dissentients.

"Never mind, belly up anyhow," insisted Borowdell. "Whisky all down the line, Mike."

A small, pudding-faced half-breed boy, clothed entirely in rags, poked his head in at the door.

"Ixta papper," he cried shrilly. "Ala news about railroad. *Daylee Ban'*. *Daylee Ban'*. Ixta papper."

The president of the North Western Railway had announced officially that his company would proceed with the construction of their Dogtown-Gateway branch during the coming season, and the editor of the *Daily Banner*, with commendable enterprise, had issued an extra on receipt of the news.

The small boy departed smiling, minus his papers and plus a pocketful of small change. At the St. Jo's, gloom was transformed into joy in the twinkling of an eye. Each man gulped down his drink and galloped wildly into the street. The boom was on again.

Ming returned to the Gateway House for lunch to find Mattie in an ill humour.

"I hate this dive, Bert."

"I'm afraid you'll have to stay here, sweetness, until I get a house of some kind."

She pouted. "I don't want to be a household drudge. I loathe housework. Why can't we go and live at the St. Jo's?"

"Can't afford it. But I tell you what, we might get a couple of rooms in some decent house."

"But it'd be so dull for me there."

"Be hanged if I know what you want. If it's something to do, why not come back to the office?"

She gave him a look of disdain. "What do you suppose I got married for. I don't think much of a husband who can't support his wife?"

"I don't fancy the idea very much myself, but I understood I was old-fashioned. These modern women

say it's a woman's right or some bally thing to earn her own money."

"Old maids who can't get a man talk that way. And married women with poor, miserable, useless husbands. They don't fool anybody."

He grinned. "You have, I take it, very definite ideas on the duties of a husband, peerlessness?"

"You bet I have; it's a husband's duty to make his wife happy and not a galley slave."

"Ah, yes, I see. And a wife's duty—if any?"

"Why, it's to make him behave himself, and not run after other women, and see that he makes a lot of money and spends it all on her."

"Very neatly put, Carissima. Well, the St. Jo's being out of the question on the score of expense—and for other reasons—what do you want to do?"

"Well, I don't mind a house if I have a maid to do the work. Or we could take rooms and go out to eat."

"But won't you get bored with nothing to do?"

"The only thing that bores me is having things to do."

"Hm, are you an adherent of the modern doctrine that women have brains and should cultivate them?"

"I suppose you're trying to be funny again, Bert Ming. I don't know what you're talking about. If you think I'm going to read a lot of deep books you've got another guess coming; I always go to sleep over a book."

"We seem to have arrived at a pretty clear understanding on one point anyhow, sweetness. Well, as the Canadians say, there seems to be something popping in this town. Jove, I'm picking up the language fast. I think I'll dash out and grab off some of the mazuma—

relieve some gink of a wad of dough. What, what? Don't get bored by over-exertion, bestest belovedest. Give me a nice kiss, and we'll see what we can do about it to-night."

He was thoughtful as he walked back to the office. "I'm beginning to realize that what a man chiefly requires in matrimony is patience and forbearance. Somebody has to exhibit 'em, and be damned if a woman will. Um-hum, well, I don't give a damn how lazy Mattie is as long as she's amiable. As long as I can keep her fed and idle, there doesn't seem any reason why we can't get along together."

Kenkenake and Whittaker were waiting for him. Whittaker was determined to buy the remainder of the property held by Acland along the North Western Railway right of way, but Acland would not deal with him direct. He had in his peculiar way taken a great liking to Ming.

Kenkenake was acting on behalf of a local syndicate with the same object in view, and he and Whittaker were engaged in a violent argument, Curtis listening with a sardonic smile.

"You know me, Duke?" pleaded Whittaker. "I done the white thing by you every time, ain't I? I'll make it right with you."

"He's a hog," grumbled Kenkenake. "We want the land for development: he's just holdin' for a profit. A town can't go ahead that way. We have a big proposition under cover."

"Gentlemen," said Ming, "in this matter I will be acting for my client. I must consider his interests first."

"Aw, go take a jump in the river with that talk," bawled Whittaker. "I'm talkin' business, I am. Come on up to Acland's."

Ming went, Whittaker vociferating all the way that he had the inside track, and making vague and dire threats against all who stood in his way, Kenkenake very mysterious about the big proposition his syndicate were keeping under cover.

Acland pounced eagerly on Ming. "Come in here, young feller, come in here. You fellers keep out."

He closed the door carefully. "Them fellers been houndin' the life out of me," he complained. "I don't know what to do, I don't know. If I sell that property an' she goes up, I lose all that money. It's enough to drive a man crazy just to think of it. An' if I hang on and she goes down an' I can't sell, an' me payin' taxes on it. It's just awful. Now, what do you say, give me your honest opinion?"

"I say sell, Mr. Acland."

"Oh, you do, you want your commission, eh? That's what you're after: don't care a tap about me maybe losin' a pile of money. An' me gettin' on in years an' nothin' laid by to keep me in my old age. No, it's your commission you want."

"Of course, I want my commission, Mr. Acland, that's how I earn my living. But my advice to you is to sell. You're sure of making a profit now, and this is an uncertain world."

"Well, you're right there; it is the uncertainest kind of a world: ain't I been in it long enough to know? But which of 'em will I sell to?"

"Better leave that to me, Mr. Acland. I'll look after your interests."

"Well, I'll be trustin' you, young man, don't you forget that. It's hard to know who to trust in these days. Get me the best price you can—make 'em pay cash—it's the sight of the money I want."

Ming took the boomsters back to the office, and a very lively wrangle ensued. He played them off cunningly one against the other, Curtis aiding by threatening to find another buyer or take the property himself. Whittaker, goaded beyond all reason by his fixed idea, offered a cash price that Kenkenake could not touch, and departed in triumph.

"If I'd held on I might have got the same price for all that property," grumbled Acland. "Look at the money I lost."

"If you ask me, you're lucky," answered Ming. "I made this man pay ten times what the stuff was worth."

With his depleted bank account the richer by over three hundred dollars, he returned to Mattie in a buoyant humour.

"Let's go out and celebrate," was her instant suggestion.

"We've done all our celebrating for the time being, Mrs. Ming. We're going out to look for a roof to shelter our unprotected heads."

"Well, but we could afford to stay at the St. Jo's now."

"We are not going to stay at the St. Jo's, my love."

"You're an old bear. Well, if you will be so mean, why couldn't we go and stay at Mrs. Hope's? She'd give us her big front room and the parlour downstairs ;

and I like Mrs. Hope, and she'd be company for me while you're at work."

They re-entered the gate under the four guardian spruces, and Mrs. Hope received Mattie with open arms. She was a leathery-faced old lady with snow-white hair and gnarled, arthritic hands.

"Well, well, so you're back safe; I was scared I'd seen the last of you when you went away. I says to myself, I says, I'll never see that girl again. But you come through all right. Didn't get into no train wreck? I was always scared of trains: give me a bull wagon for travellin'. It's slow, but it's safe. An' them big cities is a terror with them there street cars an' automobiles runnin' every which way—I seen 'em—an' robbers an' I don't know what all, like you see in the papers. I'd liefer wild Indians any time, an' I seen a-plenty. I was certain sure one or other of 'em 'd get you, but you come through after all."

She was glad to rent them the two rooms Mattie asked for, and took occasion to whisper in her ear, "Don't bad use, does he?"

Mattie shook her head with a laugh.

"I was afraid of it. A man don't think the same of a woman after he's married to her. Up till they get hitched he'd run himself to death for her; but after, well, if she'd fall downstairs an' break her neck, he'd think luck was comin' his way. Me an' my old man used to fight something terrible, but I been kinder lonesome since he went through the ice that day. An' the worst, he was full at the time, an' I don't suppose he ever knew what happened him. Oh well, I guess things is goin' to be a lot worse before they're any better."

The boom bacchanale took on a faster tempo, but competition was so keen that split commissions became almost the rule. Ming was racing from one office to another all day long, but his exertions did not bring him in a great deal of money. He was too tired in the evenings for gaiety, and Mattie grew bored.

"Life is punk," she complained. "This town's dead. Why can't we go to some good town?"

"And leave your esteemed brother in his hermitage?"

"Bert Ming, you're the meanest thing in the world. I don't know why I married you—always throwing poor Joe up at me."

"A man has to protect himself somehow against his wife."

"Just for that, you've got to take me to the show to-night, or I'll bawl my eyes out."

He was able to get a little rest, leaning back in his seat with his eyes closed, while the usual inanities flickered meaninglessly on the screen.

Dyke Flanneler's report arrived at last, a beautiful report having all the properties of magic, marvels to be performed apparently by the mere repetition of certain mystic formulae. At least, that is how the boomsters took it. No engineer was asked to pass upon it: the more ignorant one was, the easier it became to swallow it whole. It was printed, and became forthwith the boomsters' bible.

"Dern good thing for the boom," commented Curtis.

"You mean the town," corrected Ming.

"I said the boom."

"You're a blistered old pessimist."

Curtis grinned.

But business did not improve. Property changed hands to some extent, but there were five hungry boomsters for every transaction.

November. Freeze-up. A galloping gelid wind under a sky of steel, ground like flint, all water frozen inches deep in a night. The Sweetwater ran pancake ice for a few days, but gave up the struggle the night the temperature dropped to ten below. Ming felt as if he had lost a friend; the glorious river was a dead thing now, and when the snow began to fall it lay shrouded and buried.

The date of the annual municipal elections approached. At an informal meeting of the Thunder Falls Development Association, Borowdell said, "We've got to get this town into the hands of the live wires; it'll never be worth a damn while these deadheads are in. We'll have to elect a new mayor and council before we'll ever get action on the Falls."

They put up Dibble for mayor, and Ming, Borowdell and Knowland for aldermen. At the annual meeting, Ming, fired with the courage of his convictions, made a rousing and prophetic speech.

Alderman Johnny Cramp rose to refute him. Johnny Cramp had been an Indian trader for forty years; he was lean, leathery, wrinkled, but vigorous, and he proved to his own complete satisfaction that the generation of hydro-electric power was contrary to the law of God. Also that it was bad business. There was a good deal of religiosity among the older taxpayers, and a good deal of penny-pinching shrewdness, and Johnny's words carried weight with them.

Dibble made an unpromising situation worse by speaking, in spite of interruptions, for two solid hours. In fact, he talked the meeting out of the hall where it was held, and found himself almost alone when he concluded his peroration.

He derived considerable satisfaction from having delivered his oration in full, but it was a terrible shock to him when he received eighty-nine votes to his opponent's seven hundred odd.

Knowland was the only one of the reformers to be elected alderman. A good many of the supporters of the Thunder Falls project gave up then and there, real estate slumped, and a number of faint-hearted boomsters left for other fields.

Ming was bitter, angry and depressed, and reduced Mattie to tears three times in a week by inveighing against her extravagance.

"What you fellows need is a newspaper," said Curtis shrewdly. "The *Banner's* bucked you right along, and you'll never get anywhere with the Falls while it's the only daily in town. Get hold of *The News* and make a daily of that."

"You can't wake these deboshed swine up," growled Ming. "They believe it's against the will of God to get electricity from the Falls, bah. A lot of filthy, ignorant, superstitious, grovelling savages."

Curtis chuckled. "Don't lose heart, boy; this boom's not dead and buried yet, though it never was more than half alive. You ramble along and look over *The News*. If you can deal I'll back you."

Ming went off dispiritedly in search of *The News*

office, and discovered it in a long low frame building covered with rusty iron sheeting in a blind alley between a livery barn and a blacksmith's shop.

Here he encountered for the first time in his life the unforgettable smell of printer's ink. In a forlorn little room hung with cobwebs, heated by a cracked stove held together by haywire, and affording through a dirty window a superb view of a manure pile, he discovered editor Clay Chute.

Mr. Chute did not look as if he ate very often. His jaws were lank and restless, and he was chewing hungrily at the same time, tobacco, gum, and a large blue pencil. His stubbly face was marked with indigo streaks, and he wore a frowsy old sweater, trousers frayed at the heels and darned at the knees, and shoes cracked across the toes.

He sat at a kitchen table behind a narrow counter in the centre of a pile of exchanges, and there lay before him a pair of shears, an old saucepan full of paste, and some copy paper. He cut up the exchanges with the scissors, pasted slips of copy on the blank paper, and wrote captions with the blue pencil.

"Good-day, Mr. Ming," he said in a thick voice, for he was holding the blue pencil in his mouth while his hands were busy with the shears. "Just a second."

He removed the blue pencil from his mouth and substituted the scissors. A rickety door opened behind him and a short man came in. He wore an inky apron and a cloth cap, peak behind; his face was covered with hair like a Skye terrier's, and he blinked through large round spectacles.

"Now then, Mr. Chute, now then," he said in a fretful voice, "I'm awaitin'. I want half a colyum right away if them formes is to be locked up to-night."

The editor put the blue pencil in his mouth along with the scissors, snatched up the new copy, tilted back his chair, maintaining his balance by hooking his toes under the table-top, and reached out a long arm behind him.

"Wmph unfh gwa wa," he mumbled.

"Ain't enough," grumbled the little man. "I'll have to run that patent medicine ad, an' you know well they won't pay for it—t'ain't scheduled."

Chute pulled pencil and scissors out of his mouth. "You be damned, Dave," he said crisply. "I'll have some more for you before you get that set up. What do you think I am? I got to hustle some news once in a while, ain't I?"

"Well, this ain't enough, so don't say I didn't tell you," retorted Dave, and closed the door behind him with a bang.

"That feller's the pest of my life," said Chute mournfully. "Never quits hollering for more copy—all he thinks of. And I have to rustle ads and subscriptions and news, and see to every damn thing around here. It's a dog's life."

He picked up a large ruler and began to gnaw that. "Wha' c'n I do f'r you?" he mumbled.

"What'll it cost to turn this paper into a daily?" asked Ming.

Chute took the ruler out of his mouth, holding it poised in his hand and staring. He shook his head.

"You been drinking, or have I?"

Ming hoisted himself upon the counter and entered into explanations. Chute betrayed agitation ; he dropped the ruler and put his pencil in his mouth, then the scissors. Then he reached absently for the paste-brush and tried to chew the sticky handle of that as well. He made inarticulate noises.

" If you'd take some of that stuff out of your mouth I could hear you better," Ming pointed out.

" Sorry, habit of mine. Cost quite a bit of money, but it'd pay. If I had the capital, but I never could keep but two jumps ahead of the sheriff."

Absentmindedly he put several inches of the ruler down his throat.

" Can't hear you, Mr. Chute," Ming reminded him gently.

" Oh, all right. As I was saying, if I had the backing, I could get a leased wire service. A.P. franchise, you know. Want a lino, better have two. Second-hand. Probably pick up an old flat-bed press cheap. Need a few new fonts of type. Need an operator, press man, one or two comps. Dave could do make-up ; I'd take the desk. Need a reporter and somebody on the business end. Make a good start with a thousand bucks ; but, my God, where'd I get a thousand bucks ? Is there that much money in the world ? "

Once more he pouched the bluepencil and the scissors ; and was reduced to muffled mumblings.

" A thousand dollars doesn't sound unreasonable," said Ming. " Are you sure it could be done for that ? "

" You'd be surprised what you can do with a thousand," replied Chute. " I started this paper on fifty

dollars nine years ago, and I ain't died of starvation yet, though I guess I will soon."

"Well, I'll toddle back and tell the crowd," said Ming.

"I'll have to get out some more copy for Dave or he'll be in here biting me in the neck," said Chute.

"See you later, eh?"

Ming dashed back to the office, his impetuous nose thrust out and his trousers fluttering about his thin shanks, prepared to fling himself into his new game with the intense nervous energy his enthusiasms always commanded.

He found an unexpected and powerful ally in Curtis. The boomsters treated the opinions of that grim veteran with great respect, and his equivocal attitude hitherto on the Thunder Falls project had had not a little to do with its initial defeat.

"This town needs a live paper in the worst way," he said. "I'll put up five hundred myself. Get Borowdell and Oppenshaw in and the rest will climb on the band wagon. It's a wise dispensation of Providence that you only have to convince one fool and all the rest will follow him."

The Gateway News Publishing Company, Limited, was formed, and took over Chute's printing shop, paying him in stock. He was elected president and managing editor. The board of directors consisted of Curtis, Oppenshaw, Borowdell, Oakes and Knowland. Ming refused a seat on the board, saying that Thunder Falls would occupy all his time.

Chute's original modest estimate was soon thrown overboard. It was determined to have a really up-to-date paper. The old shop was sold and a building

rented on Sycamore Avenue, and later land was bought and a mortgage loan negotiated for the erection of a brick building. One new and one second-hand linotype machine were bought on long terms, and a small second-hand rotary press picked up cheap.

Editor Chute took to shaving every day instead of twice a week, and bought himself a new suit of clothes for the first time in three years. His wife was seen upon the streets in a new hat and coat, giving cause for all her feminine friends to circulate calumnious statements about her.

"Well, old man, how's the world using you?" inquired Ming, meeting Chute one morning.

"I used to spend my spare time writing out my obituary," confessed Chute. "It was about the only amusement I could afford. Now I don't care a whoop if I never die and go to heaven."

CHAPTER X

THE winter followed its usual course ; it froze continuously, and at intervals the temperature dropped to forty or fifty below zero. The skies were generally serene and hard, like a vault of pale-blue glass, but now and again an east wind brought light falls of dry snow, and once or twice a real blizzard.

It was Ming's first experience of a sub-Arctic winter, but he found himself surprisingly little incommoded by it. He bought fur coats for himself and Mattie, his own a second-hand coonskin, but for her an expensive garment that nearly wrecked his bank account.

There were mornings when his first breath of the open air caused him to gasp and started a needle-like prickling in his nostrils, but in general there was a brisk and exhilarating quality in the crystal atmosphere that filled him with strength and courage.

Mrs. Hope's house was often cold. The old dame's crippled hands made it difficult for her to tend the big furnace down in the basement.

"You know," she remarked casually one day, "one of these here days my hands is goin' to be so bad I can't light no fire, an' then likely I'll freeze to death, like there was a aunt of mind died that way down in Manitoba. There's lots of comical things can happen a person."

When the really cold weather came, Ming took over the care of the furnace night and morning, leaving her to keep it alight during the day. It had been difficult enough at any time to get Mattie up in time for breakfast, but once the snow arrived she would not get up at all until the house was warm. Ming had to bring her breakfast up to her before leaving for the office.

She used to come down town at noon to go to lunch with him, and supper they had whenever he happened to be free. In bad weather, Mattie most often shared hers with Mrs. Hope at home.

She seemed on the whole contented. She asked for money daily, apparently from force of habit, and immediately spent anything he gave her on the first thing that took her fancy. She liked to lie late in bed and sit long at table. The skating rink involved too much exertion, and even dancing aroused small enthusiasm in her. She began rapidly to put on flesh.

"All my clothes are getting too tight for me," she complained. "Pretty soon I won't be able to get into a thing."

"Take more exercise, honey-bird."

"Huh, think I'm going to wade around in snow up to my neck?"

"Well, then, give some of this heavy scoffing a bye."

"You have bright ideas, haven't you? Like me to live on tea and toast and hop around like a hen with her head cut off. Gee, you're tight; trying to save money on your wife's grub. No, you'll just have to give me some money to buy clothes."

"Mattie, I can't; business is horribly slack just now. There's next to nothing in the bank, and I haven't been inside a bar since Christmas. In fact, all I have is twelve dollars, and the devil knows when I'll get any more. We need all of that to buy food."

"Well, give me five dollars."

"Stop it, Mattie. I'll give you some money out of the first sale I make, but you'll jolly well have to sit tight until I do."

She looked rebellious, but she had learned that when he spoke in a certain tone he was not to be moved. They went to bed on rather distant terms.

He slept soundly. When he rose to get breakfast he looked tenderly at her softly flushed face and tumbled hair. Abandoned to sleep, she had the grace and innocence of infancy.

"Poor kid," he thought, "she doesn't mean to be unreasonable, and she does have rather a dull time. I'll have to take somebody by the throat and sell him something. I wonder if it would be any use giving her two dollars now. I can't spare any more."

He put his hand in his trouser pocket. It was empty. He tried the other side. Nothing. He picked up his coat and went hurriedly through the pockets, then the waistcoat. No money. He began to hunt through the room, on the floor, under the bed. No money.

He was certain it had been in his pocket the evening before. It was preposterous to imagine that Mrs. Hope could have crept up those creaking stairs in the middle of the night and robbed them without waking either. Burglars were out of the question.

But time was passing. He put on his old furnace jacket and clattered downstairs. As he flung great lumps of soft coal on the embers and lugged the ash-can out into the yard, he went on puzzling. He could arrive at no conclusion he was willing to face.

When he went in with her tray, Mattie was, or pretended to be, still asleep.

"Come on, come on," he snapped, "show a leg. My gad, woman, are you going to sleep all day?"

She raised her eyebrows at him. "Wha' so sniffy about 's mornin', Bert?"

"My money—it's gone. Can't find it. Probably kicking about the floor or in the bed somewhere. Look for it, will you? There'll be no lunch for us if you don't find it. I can't stop now—late for the office already. Bring it down with you when you come to lunch. 'Bye."

A man does not like to suspect his bride of theft: he may grow hardened later.

"Surely a girl like Mattie wouldn't do such a thing," he told himself. "She did it for a rag if she did it at all. That's it, the little imp. Glad I kept my temper. I won't let her have any fun at my expense this time."

He greeted her at noon with, "Well, did you find it?"

She shook her head. "Did you make a sale?"

"No," he answered gloomily. "Then there's no lunch for us to-day. Come on, Mattie, you did find it, didn't you?"

"I never did. But I still have a dollar left from last time; we can eat on that."

That was suspicious in itself; he had never known her keep so much as a nickel as long as three days. He was morose during the meal; he did not wish to give her an opportunity of saying he could not take a joke, but he grew more savage within at every passing moment.

She was wonderfully and amazingly innocent. She had never looked so pure and madonna-like, and the angelic notes in her voice soothed him in spite of himself. How could one suspect so perfectly beautiful a creature, and yet who else was there to suspect?

"Well, it won't be much use your coming up town for supper," he growled at last, rising. "I'll leave you to pay for this. I've got to go and see if I can choke a little money out of somebody."

It was a dismal afternoon, with a cutting north-easter whirling scattered nodules of gritty snow before it. No one wanted to be abroad, men sat and hugged stoves and radiators, and the very idea of parting with money was repugnant. One would have thought that nobody had ever sold a lot in Gateway's history.

As Ming battled with the wind from office to office, frost forming thick on every smallest hair on his face, his spirits sank to the level of the thermometer, lurking sulkily at twenty below zero. He was forlorn and penniless in a frozen land, where a gelid death crouched in wait for the destitute, and he owed his condition solely to Mattie.

"You'd better hand back that money, my girl," he said grimly that evening over his supper of tepid tea and bread and butter.

"I haven't got it, I didn't take it."

"Then who did—Mrs. Hope?"

"No-o, perhaps a sneak thief . . ."

"Don't talk rot, nobody but us three were in here last night. Hand over, and don't tell me any more lies."

"Don't you call me a liar, Bert Ming. I never took that money. And what if I did, isn't it coming to me? Didn't you promise the preacher right in front of me when we were married you'd give me everything you had? I can show you the place in the book. And I needed that money, I had to have it. I asked you for it, and you wouldn't give me any. If you're going to be so stingy, I guess I have a right to take it."

"But you don't understand, Mattie, it's all the money we have. I simply must have it back. It was you who spent all my money, I hardly spend anything on myself. You blued every penny you could lay your hands on when we were in Winnipeg, and you've gone on doing it ever since. And business has been bad . . ."

"That's like you," she interrupted shrilly, "Injun giver. Telling me all about the money you spent on me a long time ago. What did you marry me for? I didn't want to marry you? I wish I never had now, but you wouldn't leave me alone until I did. All the things you were going to do for me, huh, and look at you now. Grudge me every measly cent."

She flung herself face downward on the bed in a passion of tears.

He had an almost uncontrollable impulse to strike her. Then, as the weeping continued, so that she was racked from head to foot with quick-coming sobs, he became uneasy and then frightened.

The upshot was that he was on his knees by the bed, begging her to stop crying and forgive him. Not until he had humbled himself in the dust did she relent. With noble self-abnegation she returned to him three dollars of the money.

"I spent the rest this afternoon," she explained, "and I paid for your dinner. Don't forget that."

Ming had more material for deep thought.

"I suppose all women are like that," he concluded, "no morals and no conscience. I don't seem able to get it into her head that it's wrong to lie and steal. It's a bright lookout, but probably every married man has to put up with something like that. I'm not used to her yet, that's all. I suppose I haven't any real reason to complain—can't expect the company of a lovely and charming woman for nothing. But I'll have to keep a sharp eye on my money after this."

A very lean week followed, the leanest of the winter. Had he not managed to split a small commission with Little Willie Bee on the Saturday, they might have gone hungry over Sunday. He intensely disliked borrowing; but grown wiser, he did not tell her of his commission; but allowed her to infer that he had borrowed a couple of dollars off Curtis. The rest of the money he banked—and kept the bank-book out of her reach.

"I suppose it's all right to borrow from him," she said. "But I hate that man. I know he thinks you did a foolish thing to marry me. What does he say about me?"

"Not a word," he replied with perfect truth.

"Huh, doesn't think I'm worth talking about even. I know he hates me, and I can't bear him."

"I don't think he hates you, but he simply doesn't think about you. You're of no importance to him."

"Oh, I'm not, eh? Why don't you leave him, Bert? Start in for yourself."

"I don't like those other fellows you go around with either, they don't take any notice of me. Think I don't know what they're up to?"

Ming maintained a discreet silence; it is of no use explaining to a woman that her husband's friends keep their distance from her deliberately.

"I know how men get together and talk about their wives," she persisted.

"Well, I don't," he retorted. "Men don't discuss their wives; they have something better to do. They get together to be happy and forget their private misfortunes."

It took him forty-five minutes by the clock to pacify her after that remark.

It was a blowy day and below zero, and she refused to come for a walk. Sitting in the stuffy house gave him a headache, and he struggled into his coonskin and went for a walk, and ran into Merry Oliveau.

"Why, hello, Duke, haven't seen you for a dog's age. Why don't you ever come around an' see us?"

He twinkled at her. "Well, you know, Merry, I had rather an affecting farewell last time I was there."

"Aw, shucks, Jo's always actin' up; don't need to mind her. She's stuck on the feller in Coole's shoe store just now. Ma was askin' had I seen you only

yesterday, an' I told her I'd bring you around if I seen you."

She was so insistent that he went in with her. Jocelinda rose at his entrance, gave him a long and peculiar look, and slipped out. Mrs. Oliveau welcomed him warmly, and talked with her usual cheerful inconsequence for thirty minutes.

When he rose, saying that Mattie would be expecting him home, Mrs. Oliveau followed him step by step, talking all the way, and Jocelinda came down the stairs. She held out her hand to him in farewell, and as he took it he felt her slip a note into his palm. Feeling frightened and unhappy, he cut his adieux short, and rushed away.

He halted under a street-lamp to open the wretched note, and read :

"Do not think I reproche you I knew it was not to be. Forgive me for my heart is broken and meet me to-night by the Church. Then you will know ALL. Burn this with deadly secresy.

J. E. O."

He tore it up very carefully, poked a hole in a snow-drift with his toe, and buried it. "Damn the girl," he mused. "If Mattie ever saw that there'd be old Harry to pay. I like Merry and the old lady, but I'll have to give that house a wide bye."

He found Mattie in a fretful mood. "This is a rotten town, Bert. I do wish there were some real toney people here we could get to know."

"Angel of my heart, is there one little thing you'd do for me ?"

“What’s that?”

“Don’t, oh don’t say toney.”

“Why not?”

“It’s not done. Absoballylutely. It’s a plebism, it indicates social leprosy. Say good society, say gentle-folk.”

She regarded him with interest, her head on one side. “Don’t the best people say that?”

“Best people—ugh, the term makes me shudder: it smells ranker even than toney. No, darling, I don’t know what the best people say, but gentlefolk don’t use either of those terms.”

“All right, I’ll remember.”

“By Jove,” he thought, “have I at last found something she’s really interested in? I wonder if I taught her manners whether it would have any effect on her morals? It’s worth trying anyhow.”

He was amazed by her eager attention and her docility. Here at least there was something she was anxious to learn and to practise. Like most Canadians, she was rather vague with her table ware; she occasionally put her knife in her mouth, and she had a scavenger trick of spearing food from different dishes with her fork. He had hesitated to speak to her of what seemed the customs of the country. Mattie picked her teeth with her fork, rested one or both elbows on the table, reached for things instead of asking for them to be passed, all in the most perfect innocence.

Now he proceeded to give her lessons on correct behaviour, and found her a wonderfully apt pupil. She showed an intelligence he had not dreamed she possessed, since the already far-off days when he had

credited her with all wisdom, knowledge and perfection.

Even Western winters come to an end. On April 4th, with winter definitely routed and the snow everywhere giving place to mud, *The Evening News* made its bow to the public. It was dedicated to the best interests of a progressive Gateway, and carried more advertising in its first issue than the *Banner* was in the habit of displaying in a week. It was almost metropolitan in its make-up, containing eight pages of locally set matter, without boiler-plate.

It had been a hard winter for the boomsters, and Ham Wofflin had been hideously sober for days on end.

Curtis complained bitterly. "There's only one thing to do in this God-forgotten dump and that's get drunk, but if I drop into a bar I find fifty thirsty bums there with their tongues hanging out."

Spring brought not only flowers, leaves and birds, but immigrants, most welcome of whom were some Englishmen with a little money. The majority had come with some vague idea of ranching, but with few exceptions they were townsmen, and what they saw of pioneer life gave them vertigo. It was easy to persuade them to stay in Gateway and play the real estate market.

The boom was definitely under way once more: buildings were going on on all hands, and the North Western Railway was pushing up from the south. Everybody talked, thought and dreamed real estate. Everybody had lots to sell, or had just sold and was ready to buy.

“Turn it over, turn it over,” was the cry. “Don’t let it get cold on your hands.”

Real estate offices sprang up like mushrooms.

“I just passed an old dog kennel,” said Ming, “and a man crawled out and tried to sell me lots in Paradise Gardens.”

The town had for some years maintained in a languishing condition a Board of Trade, the staff consisting of a broken-down journalist housed in a decaying frame shanty on the river-bank. The Board of Trade was resuscitated, given new quarters in a fine office on Maple Avenue, and a noted prevaricator imported from the East as Publicity Director.

He issued a bright pamphlet, a catalogue of marvels, thoroughly misleading, yet without a single statement that could be branded as a deliberate lie. This fairy-tale was mailed in thousands to the Eastern Provinces, the United States, and England.

It brought to the town a number of totally unsuitable immigrants, as for instance, a feather worker, a bronzer, a tapestry weaver, vaguely expecting to find work at their several trades. Gateway offered them all indiscriminately a pick and shovel, or a hod, for there was work in plenty of that nature for everybody.

It brought also quite a lot of money from simple-minded people everywhere for investment in real estate.

There has long been a profound conviction in the Eastern Provinces that the West is there to be exploited. Aided by a succession of servile governments at Ottawa, powerful interests have regularly filched from the prairie provinces most of the profits of their toil. They had

been in Gateway industriously skimming the cream for a long time, and now a little flock of lesser rascals from the East alighted upon the doomed town.

Business ethics, never too rigid, rapidly declined. The sale of a piece of real estate was no longer a simple thing : it was likely to be caught up in a net of fraudulent transactions, with commissions and blackmail to be paid on all sides. The new operators were bold and cunning.

"He's from Ontario; watch your shirt or he'll swipe it," was the warning word among *bona fide* Westerners. Alas, the Westerners were not above lifting an unwatched shirt themselves.

Not all the imported rascals confined their attention to real estate, a good many specialized in wildcat stocks. For instance, the Pelican Lake Gold & Platinum Mines, Limited, opened an office, displaying in the window a large lump of gilded stone and several pieces of quartz. Pelican Lake lay somewhere in the unmapped wilderness to the north, highly inaccessible at any time of the year. There was probably gold there, for there is more or less gold all through the great Cambrian shield of Canada, but it was extremely doubtful if it could be extracted at a profit.

That made no difference to the boomsters: stocks can be gambled in as readily as real estate, and the shares were being sold cheap. Ming bought a small block and handed them to Mattie, but she was no speculator, and promptly sold them back to him at a cash profit.

"I'll have no more dealings with you, young woman," he told her ruefully.

"Turn 'em over," she giggled. "Isn't that what they all say? Well, I've made my profit and I'm getting out."

There was another development of importance about this time. The St. Jo's had gone its sinful way, growing wilder all the time, until even easy-going Gateway began to find the place stink in its nostrils. The climax came when Windjammer Whittaker, having resold some of his trackage at a big profit, embarked upon a prolonged and hideous spree. In the course of a riot on the second floor, participated in by a number of male and female guests, he fell or was thrown downstairs and broke his neck.

While the scandal was still at its height, a girl newly employed at the St. Jo's brought a charge of criminal assault against the chef, and there were sinister rumours about the fate of other girls.

Mike suddenly decided that the climate of Gateway was insalubrious, and disappeared during the night with all the cash he could lay his hands upon, including that of several guests handed to him for safe keeping.

The St. Jo's had its liquor license revoked, and speedily declined into a more or less respectable rooming house.

But its disconsolate revellers remained, and for them the closing of the bars at eleven o'clock was a hardship too great to be lightly borne. To Huck Borowdell came the great idea of the Gateway Commercial & Business Club.

No sooner was the scheme mooted than it was put in train. Gateway now prided itself on getting things

done : no grass was to be longer permitted to grow under its feet.

As every real estate man in town had been more or less forced into making subscriptions to the Board of Trade, so it became a point of honour with every true booster to buy stock in the Gateway Club. Its construction was speedily begun, and it was destined later to be one of the most famous products of the boom.

CHAPTER XI

THE English immigrants who remained in Gateway had not only brought money with them, but a number had brought wives also. The most notable contribution of these ladies to the life of the town was that fine flower of social distinctions which reaches such perfection in the British Isles.

It was an alien growth in the West, where simple and democratic manners had hitherto prevailed. But it at once struck strong root and flourished exceedingly. The women took to it with enthusiasm, though most of the men were strongly and even violently opposed. As man has never yet succeeded in denying woman anything she has set her heart upon, or forcing upon her anything she did not desire, their protests went unheeded.

Mrs. Mobb-Widgley was the evangelist of the new faith. She was a bottle-necked, long-bodied woman, with a very high colour and washed-out blue eyes. She had great determination and character.

Having set herself to the social conquest of Gateway, she made St. Sylvestre's her first battle-ground. She would make her appearance just before the service began, and sweep the full length of the aisle in view of the congregation to a seat in one of the foremost pews.

She wore a long coat of an offensive shade of yellow and a tall blue hat shaped like a helmet, with a waving crest of pink feathers. So original a colour scheme could not fail to attract attention.

She was followed generally by a waddling little man with puffy cheeks and a snub nose, who maintained with great difficulty a monocle in his right eye. Gateway had hitherto known monocles only by hearsay, as also the lorgnette Mrs. Mobb-Widgley wielded with terrifying effect.

Mattie had been a fairly regular attendant at St. Sylvestre's, and had even arrived at a nodding acquaintance with some of the less reserved members of the congregation.

Mrs. Mobb-Widgley, faced with the scarcely disguised hostility of the old members, looked about her for allies. Mattie, chilled by the slightly frosty Anglican atmosphere, received her tentative advances with delight.

"Mrs. Mobb-Widgley asked me to call on her," she told Ming.

"What, that old turkey-hen in feathers?"

"You would say that, you always make fun of everything I like. I think she's just lovely, so there. The rest of those old frozen-faces wouldn't give you a pleasant look if you was dying, but she's as nice as can be. Said she hadn't many friends in this new country, and would I drop in and have tea with her Thursday afternoon."

"Why not, beloved? I didn't mean to be nasty. Trot along; it'll do you good to get into a few tea-fights and hen conventions, give you something to amuse you. Only don't ask me to go."

The Mobb-Widgleys had rented two rooms over a barber-shop on Water Street. Mattie was met at the head of the stairs by her hostess, who smiled, displaying a surprising number of teeth, and held one arm straight out before her, allowing her hand to droop at the wrist as if paralyzed.

"My de-ar Mrs. Ming," she said in a cooing gurgle, "how perfectly sweet of you. Do-o come in. We're just camping here, you know, roughing it." She laughed, three short high notes.

Mattie was impressed, and said hastily, "Good day, pleased to see you."

She followed her hostess into a room littered with small tables and spindly chairs. All the tables were crowded with fragile objects, little china animals, glass vases, photograph frames. There was a carpet on the floor, and a bewildering array of pictures and hangings on the walls.

"We brought a few of our things with us," said Mrs. Mobb-Widgley. "I'm doing my best to give this place a homey atmosphere. It means so much to one, doesn't it? One must have one's background, mustn't one?" She laughed again.

Mattie determined to copy that laugh.

Meanwhile she preserved a wary silence, afraid of making some social error, but her hostess was never at a loss for words. She offered her guest very strong tea in porcelain cups of a fragility that filled Mattie with awe. There was also wafer-thin bread and butter and some little cakes.

Mattie was accustomed to cups that could be dropped on the floor without injury, and to meals that required

time, capacity and a knife and fork. Afternoon tea was a new experience.

On a table by her elbow lay an English illustrated paper, *The Talebearer*. It was open, as if by accident, at a page headed, "Celebrities at Ascot."

"Ah, you're looking at some of my old friends, I see," said Mrs. Mobb-Widgley archly. "It just came, and it did so take me back to old times to see their photos."

"Do you know those people?" asked Mattie, wide-eyed.

"Most of them," returned her hostess nonchalantly. "Society is becoming so vast nowadays one can't know everybody. One has one's own set, you know."

She picked up the paper and pointed. "'That's a very dear friend of mine.'"

The picture showed a scrawny woman with a grin like a shark, and a stout dark man in a turban and a peculiarly rolled beard. They were described as Lady Cynthia Fishglue and H.H. the Maharajah of Mehterpore."

"And there's another," said Mrs. Mobb-Widgley. "One of my very oldest friends."

The photo this time was of a fat woman with a bulldog face in extraordinarily ill-fitting clothes. She had been taken on the wing as it were, and one of her feet was badly out of focus. A very tall man in a white top-hat paced storklike at her shoulder. It appeared that they were the Duchess of Fumblepup and the Earl of Oxminster.

"The de-ar Duchess," cooed Mrs. Mobb-Widgley. "I've known her ever since I was a child. I know the

Earl quite well too, but he wasn't exactly in my set, you know."

"How perfectly thrilling," said the guileless Mattie, to the manifest delight of her hostess.

"There's a little par here about another very old friend of mine," she continued, and read aloud, "The Countess of Tweetleham is noted for her love of dogs. She is the proud owner of some of the finest wall-eyed dachshunds in the Kingdom."

Mrs. Mobb-Widgley gave her little laugh. "How that does bring it all back to one. The poor Countess and her dogs. My dear, she was simply insane about them."

Mattie fell into a sort of trance, while Mrs. Mobb-Widgley progressed from peerage to royalty. Her minute and intimate knowledge of the lives, tastes and peculiarities of each individual member of the Royal Family was astounding to her listener.

She became aware of the unexpressed question in Mattie's eyes, and sighed resignedly.

"And we had to leave it all," she bleated. "Poor dear Arthur lost an awful lot of money in South African stocks, De Beers, you know. My dear, we were left penniless. We had to give up our lovely little house in Mayfair, sack all the servants, my maid and the chauffeur, and give up the motor. It was perfectly ghastly."

Her face and pose indicated desolation. She smiled a pale and suffering smile.

"But there is no use crying about it, is there? One must be brave, mustn't one? When we'd sold up everything, we found we had still a little money left. But it was impossible to keep up our position, utterly

impossible, so we came out here. After all, I still have Arthur, and I managed to save a few of my precious belongings."

Mattie felt sorry for her. To lose money is, particularly to a woman, the saddest thing in life.

Mrs. Mobb-Widgley quickly recovered her spirits, and passed on to a vivid description of a court ball in which she appeared to have played quite an important part. Mattie listened with shining eyes and an open mouth.

The arrival of Mr. Mobb-Widgley, awkward, apologetic and smelling of whisky, broke the spell. His wife gave him a terrible look, and he slunk into an inner room. But Mattie felt her time had arrived to go, and rose.

"Do drop in again," begged her hostess. "I somehow feel that we are going to be very dear friends, Mrs. Ming. We'll have lots of delightful talks together, won't we?"

"My land," bubbled Mattie, rushing in on Ming breathlessly, "she's just won-derful. All the high-class people she knows: dukes and lords and duchessers, and I don't know what all."

"Duchesses, flower face."

"Oh, all right, duchesses. She showed me a picture of the Duchess of Fumblepup, and said she was her oldest friend."

"Old Grampus, eh?" said Ming absently.

"Shut up and listen. And then there was the Earl of Ox—Ox——"

"Oxminster?"

"Yes, him ; she knows him too."

"The deuce she does. Well, Uncle Algie's a good old sort."

"He isn't your uncle."

"No, that's right enough. He's—hm—never mind. Who else does she know ? "

"Oh, everybody, all the high-up people. The Queen spoke to her once."

"Patted her on the head and gave her a penny bun at a charity bazaar, eh ? Rough on the Queen."

"Don't you start poking fun, Bert Ming. I know you laugh at everything I do. You're just too mean for anything."

"Well, isn't a woman the most ridiculous thing on earth ? "

Her mouth drooped pathetically, and she brought out her handkerchief.

"There, there, I apologize," he said hastily, coming over to her.

She shook him off pettishly. "Leave me be, I don't like you. Why don't you know some big bugs ? You're English like she is, ain't you ? I suppose your folks are all poor scrubs—you never tell me anything about them."

"What difference would it make to you if I did know some big bugs, as you call them ? " he asked curiously.

"Why, I'd tell it all around ; I wouldn't let her put it over me like that. Gee, wouldn't it be fine if you had an uncle a duke or something ? You bet I'd let folk know about it."

"The Lord forbid. Mattie, you mustn't take this old coot too seriously ; England's verminous with silly

hens who spend all their spare time reading nonsense about royalty and the peerage. This Widgley female is evidently a snob of the first water."

"You're jealous, that's what you are—just because you're a common scrub. I think she's just lovely, and I'm going to ask her to tea, only I must get some thin cups and a silver tray and lace cloths, and find out how to make that thin bread and butter. Can I, Bert? Give me some money, don't be so stingy."

"I suppose I'll have to. Here, I can let you have twenty dollars. But don't start splashing about just yet. I should have some money pretty soon, and then we can do the thing in style."

Mr. Julius Nenger appeared in Gateway. He was a loosely-built man above middle height, with a big head, thin hair, bushy eyebrows, a fleshy nose a little askew, a thick mouth and a prominent chin. He dressed in black, and wore a very high linen collar and patent leather shoes. For three days he pervaded the town and its environs without opening his mouth.

This extraordinary reticence struck awe into the boomsters, for the boomster regards it as a religious duty never to be silent. When a man stops talking he is in danger of thinking, and when men begin to think the boom is over.

Mr. Nenger was discussed at an informal meeting of the Board of Trade. One party had it that he was a man of great wealth seeking profitable investments. Others maintained that he was a scout for some large corporation, spying out the land for the establishment of some huge factory.

A number had tried to pump him, unprofitably.

"Tight as a clam, talks like a fish an' won't drink," reported Little Willie Bee.

The fact that Mr. Nenger would not drink was regarded as peculiarly significant.

"He asked me when the N.W.R. was goin' to cross the river," volunteered Kenkenake.

Intense excitement. No one had heard that the N.W.R. intended to cross the river.

"You mind what I say," said Oppenshaw impressively, "that feller's on the inside. He's wise to what's goin' on."

"What do you think of him, Hank?" asked Knowland.

Curtis smiled cynically. "Well," he drawled, "if he figured on getting himself talked about, he worked out a good line."

"Now, don't be a knocker, Hank," pleaded Borowdell, "be a booster. Every knock's a boost, you know."

"I'm knocking nobody. I don't know anything about this fellow, but if you want to make him talk, invite him to a dinner and ask him to say a few words."

"Begad, that's what we'll do," shouted Oakes, a thin man with an abnormal appetite. "A good dinner's the clear thing. Who'll second that?"

"I will," piped Little Willie.

"Hear, hear," said Thwaite, a moneyed Englishman, in a deep voice.

Mr. Nenger gravely accepted the invitation to a Board of Trade dinner, formally tendered him by Kenkenake, Wofflin and Thwaite.

The boomsters attended en masse. They ate, as men eat at public dinners, like famished wolves. The guest of the evening, rising to speak, seemed nervous. He smoothed his thin hair with a large hand, scraped his chin and cleared his throat. He spoke at last in a husky, guttural voice, with a suspicion of a lisp. His first words were almost inaudible, but those nearest him made out something like the following :

"Hrmph, hrmph. No speaker, public speaker. Hrmph. Sooner do things . . . do things. Hrmph. Fine town y' got here . . . bunch live wires. Boost . . . uh . . . boost. Hrmph-hrar-hrar-hrar."

His words got a little plainer as he went on, and he did not clear his throat quite so often, but he half swallowed so many of his sentences that his speech was cryptic in the extreme. At its close there were as many interpretations as hearers. The *Evening News* published a version so much at variance with that of the *Daily Banner* that one could hardly believe both referred to the same effort.

But all agreed that he had shown great interest in Thunder Falls. Twice he had repeated that he was sorry they were not in operation. A heated argument raged around whether he had or had not said that he was seeking a suitable factory site for the utilization of hydro-electric power.

After the banquet Ming made an effort to pump him upon this point, but Nenger would not commit himself.

"If—if power was available, I could recommend perhaps my directors, you understand," he answered. "But nothing is done, you see, nothing is done. First-class proposition if we can find a good location, we have.

But we must have power, you understand. Require a minimum one thousand horsepower . . . perhaps up to five thousand. Business expansion, you see, when the business expand. But nothing is done."

"But can you give me some clear idea, Mr. Nenger? It would immensely strengthen our hands if we could put before our moribund city council a definite proposal."

Nenger shook his head vehemently. "No, no, no, not now. I examine other prospects first. I go to Edmonton and all around. Return to Gateway perhaps next month. Good proposition here you have if some live wires you can get it. But I cannot talk business, you understand, if nothing is done. Good night."

He elbowed his way unceremoniously through the crowd of eager listeners, and left Gateway on the morning train. Behind him the boomsters tore their hair and execrated the city council, and their organ, the *Evening News*, barely stopped short of libel in expressing its opinion on their lack of enterprise.

The whole town was gradually being inoculated with the boom virus, and even the old-timers were becoming infected with the fever. The chief symptoms of the disease were a tendency to rush wildly about talking incessantly, an utter confusion of values, and an itch to spend.

The worst cases displayed a delirious enthusiasm and a ferocious intolerance. Everyone who disagreed with them or who retained any traces of reason and sanity was branded as a knocker. Their twin war-crys were, "Boost, don't knock," and, "Every knock's a boost." That these phrases were mutually contradictory occurred to few.

None was worse infected than Ming, though his manners remained better than most, and he continued to be as honest as the nature of things permitted. He beheld the kingdom of heaven arriving in his own time, and the glory dazzled him. It was in vain that Curtis spoke words of cynical wisdom to him.

"Duke, you're an idealist. In plain words, you're bughouse. This is just a boom, just another boom. It'll all blow right up one of these days. Idealists make booms : there always has to be one crazy man to set the others crazy ; but it's the idealist that gets left in the hole at the finish. What you want to do is get out and rustle commissions while the picking's good. This easy money won't last long."

"You're a cynic and a pessimist, and you're a long way from being omniscient," was Ming's reply. "Perhaps a few people have lost their heads, I haven't. They'll lose their money and sober down after a bit. But this town has a future before it. When Thunder Falls . . ."

Curtis listened patiently. There was sadness and affection in his glance.

It was Mattie who firmly and not too gently brought him down to earth.

"What do I get out of this, Bert Ming ? Do you think I'm going around town barefoot in my shimmy ? I haven't a rag. Think I'm going on living in this dog-hole ? Everybody else is building nice houses up on Millionaire Avenue. The Mobb-Widgleys are putting up the dandiest little California bungalow. How'm I going to go and see her ? We're away down here on the flat, in the east end, all among the bohunks. You don't care if I do get flat feet tramping around town,

but everybody who amounts to anything has a car. I suppose you're too poor."

Immeasurable was the scorn she put into that last sentence.

"Help, help, oh, hellop," begged Ming. "Mea culpa, passion flower, see, here's twenty plunks or simoleons. Now, smile and forgive."

"Keep your chicken feed," said Mattie loftily.

Then he understood that the matter was serious. She had never yet refused money or anything else she could get out of him. With great reluctance he abandoned a project for taking a large party of boomsters out to Thunder Falls at his own expense, and set himself instead to making money.

It had never been so easy to do that in all Gateway's history. People would buy anything, anywhere. Few ever even saw the lots they bought; lots under ten feet of water found as ready a sale as any others. Since it required a good deal of ready capital to gamble in Maple Avenue property, a brisk business was worked in sub-divisions miles from town.

It was becoming increasingly necessary to walk warily, though. Enthusiastic gentlemen had a habit of selling lots they did not own, or of selling the same lot to several different purchasers.

At the Land Titles office utter confusion prevailed. The overworked staff battled vainly with a rising tide of transfers. Titles were obscured by quit claim deeds, caveats, first, second and even third mortgages, and agreements for sale. Original owners seeking second payments did not know to whom to apply, since their property might have changed hands ten times in

the interval. Taxes in the majority of cases were in arrears.

But who cared? The golden age had arrived, for that year and the year following the kingdom of unreason was established in every urban centre in the West from the Great Lakes to the Pacific.

Ming had not hitherto owned any property. He bought and sold indeed, but nothing remained in his hands more than a few days. He became a member, on occasion, of a syndicate to handle some deal too big for a single individual, but as soon as the profits had been split, the syndicate broke up, its various members forming other combinations as ephemeral. He became an expert in the splitting of commissions, and in paying and demanding stand-offs, a polite kind of blackmail.

Now, however, he bought fifty feet on Hillcrest Drive, known locally as Millionaire Avenue. Here, along the scarp of the ridge overlooking the valley of the Sweetwater, the boomsters were putting up ornate residences, each one a temple to the great god snobbery.

The procedure was simple: if one had clear title to a piece of land, one could obtain a building loan from some mortgage company for the erection of a house.

"Well, dear rapacity," he said one evening, "my loan came through to-day. There'll be a four-thousand dollar manor house going up for you soon, a few doors this side of the unspeakable Widgley."

She had been in a fit of the sulks for two days, and the import of his words did not at once reach her.

"Are you trying to be funny again?" she asked peevishly.

"Oh, what a nasty cross-patch, what a bad little girl. Here's ums hubby going to build ums a booful house, and ums still sniffy."

She jumped up. "You ain't fooling, Bert? Now, don't tease me or I'll never speak to you again. Are you really truly going to build a house up on the hill?"

"Preciseolutely, sweetness, just a few doors from her supreme ghastliness the Widge."

She flung herself into his arms. "Oh, you darling, really and truly? What kind of a house, a big house, a real big house? Can I have a maid? Are you going to get a car too? I'll have to have some new clothes right away. Can I get a fur coat?"

He held her off at arm's length. "You are dear to me," he said grimly, "inexpressibly dear. You cost me all I have and all I'll ever make, and yet you're not satisfied. Oh, for a little cheapness."

"You've got plenty of that yourself," she retorted.

"Not with that angel face," he protested. "So seraphic a face and so poisonous a tongue. Why do women so often look like goddesses and invariably behave like devils?"

"Now you're going to say you wouldn't have married me if you'd known what I was like."

"Womanly intuition," he chuckled. "Infallible, what? Now, darling, don't let's fight any more. I'll get you anything and everything I can, but give me a little time."

She put up a soft hand and smoothed his hair. "Poor honey boy, I'll be good. He's a real good hubby. But you will get me a new fur coat when you have the money, won't you?"

"In the sweet bye-and-bye. Now I have to toddle off again."

"You always say that when I ask you to do something you don't want to," she pouted.

"Young woman, you know a great deal more than is good for you. All right, shut up about fur coats and I'll take you to the theatre and supper afterwards."

"Oh, goody, goody. All right, I won't say another word about it; I knew I wouldn't get one, but you wouldn't have taken me out if I hadn't asked for one."

"From this time forth, moon of delight, I shall believe devoutly in the ancient tale that the devil made woman to annoy the Almighty."

CHAPTER XII

MR. JULIUS NENGER returned to Gateway, and the Thunder Falls Development Association surrounded him in a body. He was offered unlimited drinks, but remained offensively abstemious, and nothing would make him unbosom himself.

"I will put up to the city council a first-class proposition. This proposition will mean money for everybody in Gateway. We will locate a big factory here. But"—he wagged a large forefinger—"but we must know for sure, and power we must have, a good site we must have. Now, I ask you, what will the city do?"

"We'll send a deputation up with you to the council," offered Ming eagerly, "and if they won't listen we'll start a press campaign to make the fossilized old troglodytes squirm."

"Ooh, whee!" howled Borowdell. "Dot vos a goot vun. Say dot again, Duke, a fossilized old what?"

"A troglodyte, one of the old cave-dwellers."

"Sort of human groundhog, eh? Well, that suits 'em. Now, boys, what's our city council. All together."

"Fossilized troglodytes," came the answering yell.

"We'll hound the old mossbacks to death with that slogan," predicted Borowdell.

At their next meeting the council found their chamber crowded with adherents of the Thunder Falls project.

Nenger was grudgingly accorded permission to address the hostile aldermen, but his speech was ineffective.

"Why don't you take something for that cold?" inquired the mayor with heavy sarcasm.

Nenger glared and mopped his brow.

"I don't understand what this man's sayin', Mr. Mayor," interrupted Alderman Johnny Cramp a moment later.

"Nor nobody else," supplemented old Josiah Strachan.

"I believe he's just talkin' for fun," interjected wizened little Dougal McGregor.

"I won't talk to men won't listen," roared Nenger.

"None of us asked you to," said Cramp. "I would move, Mr. Mayor, that this man be told to put his proposition in writin', an' we can then file it."

With an explosive snort, Nenger turned short and tramped out of the chamber, followed by his noisy and indignant backers.

The *Evening News* assailed the council with the epithet fossilized troglodytes. Everyone repeated the offensive words, they became the rallying cry of the reformers. Nigger Jim, town garbage collector, was heard to address his lazy mule as, "You wu'thless, long-ear, forsle trogalite."

"No, I can't wait," said Nenger to a proposal that he address a mass meeting. "I must go to Montreal see my directors. Deadheads, that council—put 'em out. Get some live wires. Hrmph. Then let me know."

"Can we put any definite proposal before the electors?" begged Ming.

"Nothing is done, nothing. They insult me. I say nothing now, but get live council in. Do something.

Then—hrmph—big factory, factories—double, three time population it makes—big city. Hrmph. Show me results I show you results.”

He went his enigmatic way.

The boomsters assailed the council night and day, but they were stubborn old men who had ruled Gateway for twenty years, and they were not going to be rushed by a horde of strangers. They sternly voted down every proposal put before them, even public improvements that were urgently needed by a town that was expanding daily.

“While I have anything to say,” said Johnny Cramp with a snap of his grim old jaws, “this here town won’t be run by any gang of wildcat real estaters.”

The municipal elections approached, and the reformers nominated Knowland for mayor, and Ming, Borowdell, Rates, Oppenshaw and Thwaite for aldermen. Curtis refused to stand.

“I don’t think you can elect an American citizen,” he said, “and I never mix in politics. I never knew a politician who wasn’t either a rogue or a fool, and most of ’em are both. I don’t claim to be either.”

The mayor and all the retiring aldermen stood for re-election. Their following was not so weak as appeared on the surface, for many of the noisiest newcomers owned no property and had therefore no vote, while there were many conservative old-timers who would never vote for a newcomer.

The annual meeting was held in the Royal Theatre, which was packed to capacity by a crowd anxious to see a fight. However, it proved very dull at first, and the worthy burgesses grew bored and restless.

Ming's turn came to speak. He had been alternately shivering and sweating, but the moment for action found him cool. He caught a smile from Mattie, and walked briskly to the footlights from which the candidates addressed the audience.

"Is this a prayer meetin'?" demanded a derisive voice from the gallery.

Ming snatched the cue, which, indeed, he had thoughtfully arranged beforehand.

"Yes, my friend, it is a meeting to pray for the health of our poor town. Ladies and gentlemen and Mr. Chairman: Gateway is sick. She's lying down, she has no energy. There are a lot of old doctors sitting at her bedside, but they don't know what to do. All they can think of is a low diet—no expansion. Keep the patient down, and in a little while, my friends, there'll be nothing left but to invite Dogtown to the funeral."

People who had been on the point of going home thought better of it.

"We have been listening to the reports," went on Ming. "What do they show? They show that nothing has been done. They take pride in the fact that the town's standing still—standing still when every other city in the West is expanding and growing in all directions—Gateway's still sitting dreaming of the days when it was a trading post for Indians."

There was a burst of applause, some booing and a few hisses.

"I won't take up any more of your time," concluded Ming. "If you do me the honour to elect me, I promise to work night and day for the development of the Falls, for the extension of public services, and to bring new

industries into the town. Re-elect the old council, ladies and gentlemen, and most of us who have come into the town in the last year or two will not be present at the funeral, and Gateway will remain only a little frontier village somewhere north of Dogtown."

Into the clamour, the clapping and shouting and cat-calls and boos and hisses, leapt Alderman Johnny Cramp. He waved his arms and opened his mouth, but all that could be heard above the tumult were a few disjointed words shrieked in a voice cracked with age and fury.

"Dirty speculators . . . wild-catters . . . ruinin' the town . . . four flushers . . . rascals. . . ."

"Mr. Chairman, I protest against Alderman Cramp's language," cried Ming.

"I'll say what I damn please," howled Cramp, and struck him in the face.

Ming's clenched fist came up, and fell again to his side. He stepped back. "I don't hit old men," he said quietly.

The theatre was a bedlam. Cramp's friends dragged him away, gesticulating and screaming. Every other sound was drowned in the shouts of the reformers cheering for the Duke of Gateway. The meeting broke up in confusion.

A copy of the *Dogtown Clarion* reached Gateway a few days later carrying a long editorial, advising Dogtown to take over and operate Thunder Falls for its own benefit, Gateway being too small, poor, and unenterprising a settlement for so large an undertaking. It caused intense irritation in the town, and provided more ammunition for the boomsters.

The ages have been vocal with the sufferings of woman. Doubtless they will continue to be so unless feminine nature changes very markedly.

Ming arrived home to find Mattie groaning on the couch, her face very pale, and in her eyes the look of an angel stricken with the wrath of God.

"Great Scott, what's the matter, darling?"

"Oh, nothing, Bert. Just my heart."

"Your heart. I never knew there was anything the matter with your heart."

"I kept it to myself."

"But, my God, girl, if you have heart disease you should have told me. I'll go for the doctor at once."

"No, Bert, don't; it's nothing really. I'll get over it. I often have these attacks. My mother died of it."

"Well, I'm going to put you to bed and get a doctor."

He lifted her in his arms and struggled with her up the steep and narrow stairs. She was becoming a very substantial weight, and in the past year she had lost all her girlish slenderness. Still panting and dizzy from his exertions, he ran out for a doctor, and secured Dr. Card.

The doctor was middle-aged, short and stiff-backed, with a head of bristly red hair and fierce blue eyes. He was an excellent physician, but his success among women in particular was retarded by one serious defect. He would tell the truth. Financially, it is more important that a doctor should be a convincing prevaricator than a good physiologist.

He examined Mattie with thoroughness, while she bore her pains with the patient fortitude upon which women never tire of expatiating. Ming followed him downstairs into the parlour, quivering with anxiety.

"Is her condition serious, doctor? Tell me the worst at once."

Dr. Card snorted. "Serious nothing," he said brusquely, "she'll be all right in a couple of days."

"But isn't her heart affected?"

"Her heart is probably sounder than yours, nothing the matter with her constitution at all. A touch of acute indigestion: I'll give you a prescription, but all she really needs is to stop over-eating and take more exercise."

It was unwise: a man should respect his wife's foibles; but Ming's relief was so great that he rushed upstairs and repeated the doctor's words to Mattie.

"The idea," she cried indignantly. "And you believed him. I hardly eat anything, and I hate exercise. That's the last time that man comes into this house. I won't take his miserable medicine. I'll just lie here and die. You don't care for me any more, you'd be glad if I did die from a heart attack. You'd go get another wife and forget me before I was cold."

She forgot she was ill and sat up in bed to denounce him. He fled. As he tramped along, he moodily asked himself a question every married man has asked himself, without ever receiving a satisfactory answer.

"What in hell does a man get out of marriage?" he growled. "Just the privilege of keeping a perfectly useless female all her days, and putting up with her poisonous ways and still more poisonous tongue. I wonder who invented marriage. I bet it was a woman—no man ever got anything out of it yet except worry and annoyance. If Mattie cost me nothing I'd still be paying more than she was worth."

"I suppose marriage is necessary for the continuation of the human race, but I don't notice Mattie showing any enthusiasm about continuing the race. Whenever I try and say a word about it, you'd think to listen to her that I was trying to cut her throat. I'd like to know who's going to have babies if women aren't? I never met a woman who was any use for anything else—and most of them don't seem much use at that."

By that time he had worked off his fright and his annoyance, and he began to grin.

"Oh, well, the poor kid, I suppose she can't help herself, and I'm still dotty about her. Gad, I've come a long way in a year. I thought I was marrying one kind of woman—I thought I knew just the kind of woman she was—and I found I'd married a stranger. I expect every man does that. Oh well, I'm getting used to her, and it's no use yowling about it. I'll get her something and cheer her up."

He had the prescription filled, and coaxed a jeweller into re-opening his store and selling him a pretty little bracelet that had caught Mattie's predacious eye a day or two before.

He found she had been weeping, but he had learned to value her tears at their true worth. Where a man swears, a woman weeps, and one is no more important than the other. She turned her head away, but he bent down and kissed her.

"Time to take um's medicine, babykins."

"I won't, I won't touch the dirty stuff. Go away."

"Den ums won't get um's bacelick, um's 'ickle jingly bacelick."

He dangled the bauble at the end of a finger. She reached for it, but he snatched it away.

"Give it here," she demanded.

"No, must take um's medicine first. Nicy medicine."

She sat up. "Bert Ming, I think you're the meanest thing on earth. I won't take that medicine."

"Well, bye-bye. I'll toddle down town and find some nice girl who wants a bracelet."

"You come back here, or I'll scream. I won't be treated like a kid, I won't. I'll take your old medicine, but I want my bracelet first."

He gave it her. She clutched it and made a face at him. "Now I don't have to take the nasty stuff."

"Mrs. Ming, in about two minutes I'll sit on your chest, and hold your nose until you open your mouth. Then I'll pour the whole bottle down your naughty throat."

"You are a bear," she said resignedly. "All right, but if it's nasty I won't take another dose."

He gave her a spoonful of the brown liquid. She shuddered. "Ugh, ugh, I'd like to poison that old doctor."

"I'm going to keep this bottle," he announced, "and every time you're sick or saucy I'm going to give you a big dose."

"I'll leave you if you do."

But peace had been restored between them, and she went peacefully to sleep in his arms, the bracelet on her wrist.

Election day. The sun rose a little after eight in a clear sky. A fine rime was falling, glittering in the

air, on the ground, on fences, buildings, trees with prismatic hues of breath-taking loveliness. The temperature was above zero and there was no wind. A perfect winter day.

Voting began early and continued briskly. The reformers were able to bring voters to the polls from the furthest limits of the city in their automobiles, and this gave them an advantage over the diehards, few of whom had taken to motor transport as yet. By the time the polls closed at eight p.m. a record vote had been cast, no less than ninety-three per cent. of the resident burghesses having voted. But the issue remained in doubt.

Mayor Hoopler was known to have a strong following in the west end, and it was rumoured that Johnny Cramp had the east end in his pocket. Only at the central poll were the reformers at all confident of a majority.

They gathered in the office of *The News* to await the returning officer's report. The old guard were clustered about the converted church that housed the *Banner*.

Clay Chute picked up the telephone. "That you, Happy? Moab count in, eh? All right, go ahead."

He began to repeat aloud the figures coming in over the wire, the reformers clustered close.

"Hoopler 287, Knowland 198. Hell. All right, I was just saying hell. Go on, Happy. Grabenhoff 201. He's a Moabite, anyway. All right. Howick 188, McKee 187, Ming 174. Well, that's good, anyway. All right, give me those who didn't get in. Borowdell 146."

"Damn it, that lets me in," interjected Borowdell. "First five."

"Shut up," snapped Chute. "How the devil can I hear with that racket going on? All right, Happy, I didn't get that, there's a jackass braying at my elbow. Rates 144, Oppenshaw 109, Thwaite 100, Bindon 66, Smith 4."

"I guess that fixes me," said Knowland gloomily, "I'm nearly a hundred down now."

"Aw baw," shouted the buoyant Borowdell. "You'll get that all back at the city hall poll. The east end is old Johnny Cramp's backyard, anyway. Say, when are those other deadheads comin' through, Clay?"

"Just hold your horses, Huck, hold your horses," drawled Chute.

"Damn you, Clay, you ain't bein' elected for the first time in your life."

Chute put up a hand as the telephone chattered again.

"Hello, hello, yes. West end poll. Spill it, Billy. Hoopler 216, Knowland 110."

"May as well go home," groaned Knowland.

"Shut up, the last dog ain't hung yet," Borowdell encouraged him.

Chute went on, "McKee 148, Bindon 140, Smith 122, Howick 98, Ming 81. One of ours, anyway. Yes. Grabenhoff 66, Rates 54, Oppenshaw 50, Thwaite 39, Borowdell 7."

"Ain't got a friend in the west end," mourned Borowdell. "And after all I done for 'em, the dirty bums. Say, Clay, do you think I have a chance?"

"Not a one in the world, you're too well known in this town. Duke'll get in sure, and Knowland might too; but the pair of 'em'll have one sweet time in council, two against seven."

"Oh, my God, when will those boneheads at the city hall come through?" fretted Borowdell. "Must be all drunk."

An agonizing wait and the telephone tinkled once more.

"Well, we'll know now," said Chute, picking up the receiver with maddening deliberation and pulling a pad of copy paper within reach.

"Hello, yes, Tom. City Hall poll. Let her go. Uh-huh, did you say 867 or 367? What's that? Bum connection. Hey, central, central. Damnation, the wench cut me off."

He leaned back in his chair and grinned at the anxious faces. "Oh, she'll wake up again when she finishes fixing her hair. Women are like that. No call to get excited."

"I believe you're doin' it on purpose," yammered Borowdell.

"Here she is again. Good girl," said Chute cheerfully. "Hello, yes, she cut us off. All right, Tom, shoot the works. Knowland 667, Hoopler 48c."

"That's done it," moaned Knowland.

"Hold on, maybe I didn't get that right—buzzing on the 'phone. Speak up, Tom, will you. What's that? four-forty for Hoopler. Four-forty it is."

"Knowland's in, Knowland's in," chanted Borowdell.

"Choke him," snapped Chute.

Oppenshaw and Ming took him by the back of the neck.

"Go on, Clay, we've got him."

"Ming 566, Rates 489, Oppenshaw 463, Borowdell 437."

"Ow-wow-wow-wow," howled Borowdell, imitating a coyote.

They flung a coat over his head and dragged him into a corner.

"Thwaite 411," continued Chute, "Smith 272, Bindon 216, Howick 171, McKee 135, Grabenhoff 87."

"By Jove," said Ming with a shining face, looking up from the paper on which he had been working out the vote, "we're all in. There'll be none of the troglodytes on the council except old Johnny, McGregor and Straike. Three against six."

"Well, anybody that goes to bed sober to-night has a right to feel ashamed of himself," said Borowdell with conviction. "Here's one boy ain't."

"I don't know what to do, Bert?" Mattie spoke in her childish whimper.

"What's the matter now, babykins?"

"I have to go and see poor Joe again next week, and I'm scared Mrs. Mobb-Widgley will find out. Do you think I ought to go?"

Ming scraped his lean jaw and grinned. "Not having any, love bird. You'll have to decide that for yourself."

"I think you're dirty mean. How do I know what to do? If Mrs. Mobb-Widgley finds out—she's so refined."

Ming snorted. "Probably half her relations in clink, and the rest ought to be."

"That's a slam at me; you would insult your poor, helpless wife."

He laughed unfeelingly. "As helpless as seven Bengal tigers. A man-eating shark doing the paffetick. No,

star of my soul, you're not going to start a war with me over your brother ; I'm getting wiser with years and bitter experience. If you want to see him, go : if you're afraid of the Widge finding out, don't go."

" But I can't make up my mind."

" I'm not making up minds to-day."

She remained in a painful state of indecision until noon of the day on which she had to go to the penitentiary or forego her visit for another two months. Then loyalty or some other feeling prevailed, and she sent Ming post-haste for a horse and cutter. In her passion for secrecy she made him cross the river, and then re-cross it on a wood trail above the penitentiary.

" Come back for me at four," she directed. " And don't let anybody else see you, or I'll go crazy."

It was dark when he returned to pick her up, and she permitted him to take the direct road to town, but she pulled up the collar of her fur coat and crouched low in the seat.

" I don't know how I can ever go back there again," she wailed. " This is the awfulest town for gossip. Somebody'll find out and tell Mrs. Mobb-Widgley, and then I'll never be able to hold up my head again."

Ming said nothing.

CHAPTER XIII

IN the post-election issue of the *Evening News*, there appeared a half-tone cut, headed, "Duke Ming Heads Aldermanic Poll." Ming, looking at it, was struck by a bright idea.

"By Jove!" he murmured, "I believe I'll write to the governor. That picture will be a poke in the eye for stepmother: she always prophesied I'd die in a ditch. How long is it since I wrote? Must have been from Buenos Ayres or Papeete. Long time ago anyhow. Poor old boy, he was always jolly good to me. Don't know how the devil he stood stepmother, though. He'll be amazing bucked to learn that his prodigal is a full-fledged alderman and a power in the land."

He wrote a long and affectionate letter to his father, an impoverished country gentleman of excellent connections, married to a shrew and afflicted with three vixenish daughters. He enclosed clippings from the *News*, and Dyke Flanneler's report on Thunder Falls, and addressed the whole to Frederick Ming, Esq., Shotover and Missed, near Tootle, Punts, England.

A month or so later he received an answer. Ming senior expressed himself as greatly bucked, but it was against his traditions to be emotional. He reported stepmother about as usual, the girls also about as usual. He sent his affectionate regards to Mattie, and was

anxious to know if she were related to the Yorkshire Seebrights.

He reported the hunting very poor, pheasants only fair, but partridges plentiful and strong on the wing. His old hunter had cast a shoe and pecked badly at a post and rail near Coldhanger Spinney. The old gentleman appeared to have suffered injuries on that occasion, but he was vague about it, announcing only that he was getting about quite briskly with a stick now.

But what made Ming prick up his ears was the following :

“By the way, have you come across a chap called Widgley? I spent the week-ends at Cadgings and talked about you. Oxminster’s butler, a very decent old sort, came to me on the Q T and said he had a son out where you are. I gathered the boy had been something of a trial and expense to the old chap. Married an upper housemaid or something of the sort, and went out to Canada. I promised I’d ask you when I wrote.”

Ming lay back in his chair and laughed. “Good, amazing good! The unspeakable Widge an upper housemaid. Golly, wouldn’t Mattie boil over.”

He was about to call the news up the stairs, but checked himself. “No, better not. Shouldn’t give a woman any more chance to make mischief than you can help. After all, what does it matter? As long as the Widge doesn’t make herself too loathsome, I’d better keep this to myself.”

He replied to his father, "There's a curious little animal here calling himself Mobb-Widgley. He's harmless enough, but his wife's a horror. They're cutting quite a dash on the strength of her aristocratic connections. Tell old Widgley to hang on to his oof and let his hopeful work for his living, there's plenty to do here for a man who is willing."

The Mobb-Widgleys moved into their new bungalow, and Mrs. Mobb-Widgley issued an invitation to a *musical* on neatly engraved cards.

"How do you say that word?" asked Mattie. "What's it mean, anyway?"

He explained.

"You have to come too, Bert."

"Mattie, darling."

"You have to come. I believe you like just to associate with lowlifes. Whenever I want you to come to something good society with me, you always back out. I don't know what you have against Mrs. Mobb-Widgley. I guess she's just about the highest-toned woman there is in Gateway, and . . ."

Ming joined his hands and rolled his eyes in supplication. "Pax, light of my soul, pax. I surrender unconditionally; lead me to the gallows."

"You think you're being funny. I call it foolish. If we're going to live like gentlefolks we better begin right away, though I guess you'd sooner go on being a scrub."

Mrs. Mobb-Widgley had made good her conquest of the town. Her brutal insolence, her supreme mastery of the art of snubbing, and her intimate acquaintance with the royalty and nobility of the British Isles, formed

a combination which no lesser snob could resist. There were rebels in plenty, but they grumbled in secret, and there was scarcely a woman in Gateway who would not have cut a throat to obtain an invitation to her housewarming.

The drawing-room of the new bungalow was remarkably spacious, a tribute to Mrs. Mobb-Widgley's social genius. She had solved the problem of entertaining on a large scale in a small house, for besides the drawing-room the place contained only a small kitchen and a smaller dining-room. The couple slept upstairs in a pinched attic.

The dining-room was allotted to the ladies for a cloak-room, and the gentlemen had to be content with the microscopic hall. The kitchen was in the hands of the caterers. Mrs. Mobb-Widgley stood to receive her guests in a peach-coloured evening gown that clung precariously to her sloping shoulders.

She said, "Hah-de-dooo. Delighted. So-o good of you," to each of her guests in turn.

Mr. Mobb-Widgley wrestled with his fugitive eyeglass, and said, "Haw, old man, you heah? Bai Jove, what a crush."

Most of the ladies were in something approaching evening dress, but among the men only Mobb-Widgley wore a claw-hammer, and looked like a waiter who had added an eyeglass in an attempt at disguise.

For the music, Mrs. Mobb-Widgley had been forced to depend upon local talent, but local talent was plentiful and only too anxious to perform.

Mrs. Winkinhorn, an Englishwoman with a long neck, no chin, and large front teeth, did something

Chopinesque to the piano. From time to time a note was actually heard above the conversation. She was rewarded by a perfunctory clapping of hands.

Miss Delia Simmins sang ; she had studied in Winnipeg and was full of soul and feeling.

All amateur, and many professional, singers may be roughly divided into two classes : the shudder-shrieks and the gurgle-clucks. Miss Simmins was an eminent shudder-shriek. She climbed shakily, the tremolo stop full out, to a high note, gave an appalling yell and fell off her perch. She did that a number of times, and wound up with a prolonged noise resembling nothing so much as the protests of a young pig pulled down by a dog.

It was Ming's misfortune to possess a sensitive ear, and he suffered a good deal during the song. But Miss Simmins, being encored, did it all over again to what appeared to be a slightly different air.

Then a young German got up with a violin. He played somewhat recondite music with more than average skill. Ming got as close to him as he could, but the sounds hardly penetrated to him through the noise of twenty women talking at once.

Then it was the turn of Mrs. Crott. She was tall and of great circumference. As a bosom-heaver she was insurpassable. It was rumoured that she had studied in Munich and Milan. She was a gurgle-cluck of parts.

She sang " Mammy's Li'l Cross-eyed Coon " with wonderful expression, and her imitation of a bereaved cow bawling for her calf was masterly. Her volume and power were such that the women were reduced

to shrieking in one another's ears to be heard at all.

Mrs. Winkinhorn again did something to the piano, but by this time the company were getting hungry and peevish. You may interest men in music, some men, but it is very difficult to interest a woman in anything but food.

Mrs. Mobb-Widgley recognized the symptoms. Large trays were handed round by two girls in white aprons and caps, but there was not quite enough for everybody. The struggles of the women to get all they could were touching, the despair of those for whom only scraps remained heartrending.

There was more miscellaneous noise-making after supper, but no one took any interest in it, and the company began to thin.

"Let's get out of here, Mattie," said Ming urgently. "That she-wolf over there's going to howl again, and I've had enough."

"But it isn't over yet, Bert."

"It's bad form to be the last to leave," he assured her solemnly. "It simply isn't done, you know."

"Is that so? Then I suppose we'd better go."

The society columns of both the *Evening News* and the *Daily Banner* carried full accounts of the musicale, with the names of the guests and a description of the clothes worn by the women. Social snobbery had come to stay in Gateway, and Mrs. Mobb-Widgley was its acknowledged leader.

The new council entered upon its term of office filled with energy and optimism. In Ming there burned a

white flame of enthusiasm; the City Beautiful had appeared to him as in a vision, and he was setting out to achieve it. He had abounding faith in the future, and in his fellow-man.

Thunder Falls was taken in hand at once. The Dominion vaguely gave the undertaking its blessing, but declined to contribute.

Julius Nenger reappeared, and was received like a conquering hero. He was, it appeared, willing to establish factories for the manufacture of anything anyone cared to mention. All he asked was a free site, and a little matter of the city's guarantee on two hundred thousand dollars worth of construction bonds.

He got them.

The news getting abroad, a fresh flock of birds of prey swooped down upon the city. You could buy shares in Tadpole Lake Gold, Bonanza Valley Silver, Black Gold Oil Wells, and a dozen other wildcat flotations.

Garry Nachtmier, a one-eyed man with a twanging drawl, lank black whiskers, and a prominent Adam's apple, announced that Gateway stood on a syncline, or an anti-clyne, nobody knew which, or cared, and that oil could be had for a little boring. He secured enough money to erect a drill of sorts on the sandhills across the river, and to acquire a lurid attack of delirium tremens.

Then there were Knockleby and Wonks. Knockleby burst into the office one day and fell upon Ming. He was a sort of human toothpick for slenderness, with a bushy head on one end, and the wildest eyes Ming had

ever seen. They were alternately green and yellow, according to the state of his emotions

"See that feller?" he asked in a stage whisper, one hand before his mouth and the other pointing out of the window. "That there's Herby Wonks, lemme tell you."

He stepped back to observe the effect of his announcement, his changeable eyes flickering like candle flames in a draft. But Ming had grown hardened to weird characters, and merely raised his brows.

"That's the man, sir," continued Knockleby, pointing his finger at Ming, "what invented the anti-friction, non-bind, heliotizer. He invented the undeviating centrotrome. The things that feller has invented: say, there ain't nothin' you could mention, but what he has a invention for it, or he could study one out for you. An' that man, sir, to-day, sir, ain't got the price of a drink in his pants. Now, what y'think of that?"

"Why doesn't he sell some of his inventions?" asked Ming.

"There you have it," pounced Knockleby, his eyes a vivid green. "They won't buy, they want to get 'em for nothin'." He stepped close, bent his head, and whispered thrillingly, "They want to steal 'em."

"Who do?"

"The big interests, sir, yes sir. Listen here, if he was to get the backin', he'd have them fellers hunt'in their holes in a week. Their patents, to hell with their patents—wouldn't be worth a nickel a ton." He snapped his fingers. "Now you see. Now you know why he's the most watched man on the American continent

to-day. Dassent write nothin' down—got to carry it all here." He tapped his head. "Herby, you come here an' talk to this gentleman."

There shuffled into the office a squat man, very dirty, in a long greasy black coat, buttoned tight, no collar, and a dinted stiff hat. He had a puddingy face, pale under the dirt, with a few black bristles sticking up here and there, a flat nose, and dead, mouse-coloured eyes.

"Herby, I want you to tell this gentleman about your heliotizer."

"Wa-a-al," drawled Wonks in a weak, hoarse voice, scarcely above a whisper, "it's like this here. That there heliotizer . . . But, say, I'm that dry I can't talk."

"An' that's the shape they got this man into," said Knockleby in passionate protest. "Do you know, that man, sir, slep' out the last three nights, in this cold weather what we been havin'. Last night the best we could do was a haystack. If that feller don't get a drink right away, the world will lose the greatest inventor it ever had."

Ming pulled out a quarter with a smile. "All right, take this, and save his life."

"That's the best bit of work you ever did in your life," Knockleby assured him, clutching the coin. "You'll live to remember my words, mister. Come on, Herby."

The peculiar pair pervaded Gateway for some months, picking up a living no one knew how. When Wonks could be got to talk at all, he spoke a weird jargon composed of technical and scientific terms. Nobody understood him, and therefore there always remained some doubt in the minds of his listeners as to whether he

really was an eccentric genius or merely a beggar. But he did not actually invent anything while in town, and the loquacious Knockleby somehow contrived to beg for both.

The boom was entering upon its final and wildest period. The furthest-out sub-division was nine measured miles from town, but people bought lots even there. Men owning a few dozen lots—not yet paid for—calmly asserted themselves to be worth several thousand dollars—and half believed it themselves.

All Gateway was on the market: half the city might change hands in twenty-four hours, and change back again at a paper profit in another twenty-four. There was no longer anything stable or dependable; the whole was a boiling pot in violent ebullition, surrounded by capering lunatics. Buildings went up with feverish speed; the number of automobiles doubled and doubled again within a few weeks.

Literally swarms of immigrants poured into the town, every building was full, and clusters of tents dotted the outlying fields. The boomsters asserted that the population was now fifteen thousand—an exaggeration by hardly more than a third.

“Twenty thousand by next spring,” they blustered. “Fifty thousand in three years.”

In the midst of it all Curtis sprang his mine.

“Well, Duke, I’m pulling out,” he announced one morning.

Ming stared and burst into vehement protest. “Man, you’re dotty. Why, the real thing’s just beginning. Only last week we signed the contract with the Hydraulic Construction Company for Thunder Falls.

"That don't cut any ice with me, real estate's my job, and real estate's dead."

"Oh, that's just a temporary pause for readjustment," said Ming, glibly repeating the formula.

"It'll take at least ten years for readjustment," prophesied Curtis. "'When a town goes on a boom jag like this, it may take it twenty years to come back. There isn't a piece of property within the city limits that isn't held for ten times what it's worth, and the further out you go the worse it is.'"

"But real estate is worth more than it was," protested Ming. "This town's gone ahead."

Curtis got up with a grim smile and pointed to the map. "Old Billy Roper told me he owned Block 4, Plan H6, here where I have my finger. All right, he sold that last year for nine hundred dollars and thought he was doing well. There was nothing on it then but bush and slough, and there's nothing but bush and slough on it to-day. Do you know what it sold for last week?"

"No, I haven't been following the market very closely."

"Eighty-five hundred dollars. How big will this town have to be before that stuff is worth five hundred dollars a lot? Anybody who owns vacant property in Gateway to-day is holding the bag. Real estate's all shot, and I never stay once a boom busts. I figure to get out at least one long jump ahead of the slump."

"You always were a blighted old pessimist, Hank. There may be a little setback, but with Thunder Falls and Nenger and the oil and mining developments and all the rest, it won't take long for the old burg to chirk up again."

Curtis shook his head. "I feel sorry for you, Duke, you're about the only whole-hearted idealist in this town: the rest are just out to grab theirs. I believe you think more of what you're doing for the town than of what you're going to get out of it. It's going to hit you hard, boy.

"No, I'm headed for Southern California: they tell me there's going to be the greatest sucker fishing on earth down there right away. I'm fed up with this damn cold climate, and these Canucks and English are too cautious and too tight. There's no slicker like an American slicker, and no sucker like an American sucker. A Canuck sucker has to sniff all around before he'll take the bait, but a genuine American sucker just shuts his eyes and takes hook, line and sinker. Down in the States a little two by four boom like this would be all over in six months, and every boob skinned clean. Some of these damned Canucks still have a little hide left on 'em after two years."

"What are you going to do with your property here, old man?"

"Turn it over to you. I've made my pile. I came in here with about forty-five hundred bucks, and I'm pulling out with twenty thousand cash. It don't sound much with all these paper millionaires swelling around town, but it's all money, and it's a fair net profit for three and a half years. I might make a few dollars more if I stayed, but I'm not a hog."

"But, man, I can't take it as a gift."

"Why not? I'm not giving you much, just a few lots in Lakeview Heights, most of 'em under water. You can cut a ditch and drain 'em if you like, but I

wouldn't advise you. You may as well take over the loan and insurance agencies; they'll make you about enough to live on if you go after the business. I don't own another thing in this town. When I leave Gateway I'll carry everything I have in the world under my hat. I'll be well fixed at that, and won't owe anybody a cent."

Ming seated himself on his desk and swung his feet, looking down at the toes of his shoes. "Sorry to lose you, old man," he said in a low voice.

Curtis turned eagerly. "That's good of you, boy. I appreciate that. Say, will you come with me? Drop all this stuff, there's nothing in it: you'll only end up by losing your shirt. Come along down to a decent climate, where you can get some real action. You and I have always worked in so well together."

Ming shook his head. "Sorry, old man."

"No, I was afraid you'd say that. Well, I tell you, I'll keep in touch with you, and when the bottom falls out of this you can pick up and come on down. You'll find the States a pretty good country to live in."

"Done," said Ming, standing up and putting out his hand. "If this town turns belly-up, we'll run down to California and look you up."

Curtis gave out that the state of his health compelled him to seek a milder climate, and was tendered a farewell luncheon by the Board of Trade. Ming saw him off at the station, and both were more moved than they cared to show.

"Remember, Duke, you have a friend. Don't let yourself get stuck for the price of a ticket to California."

"Thanks. Best of luck, old man."

Ming closed the old office and rented a room in the new Rates Block. Though Curtis' pessimism momentarily shook his faith in the future, he, like almost everybody else, wilfully blinded himself, refusing to see anything ahead but a shining vista of endless prosperity.

CHAPTER XIV

THE Mings moved into their new house, a comfortable building in the bastard California bungalow style so popular in the West before its ill-adaptability to the rigours of the climate became manifest.

One of the last real estate transactions in which he was concerned was the sale, without commission, of Mrs. Hope's house and her three adjoining lots to the Gateway Rubber & Aluminium Company. The Company began the erection of a factory, and its uncompleted shell remained for years a melancholy monument to another wildcat enterprise. With the money he purchased an annuity for the old woman.

"Well," she said, "I guess you done right, Mr. Ming. I guess you done right. But likely I'll up an' die on 'em inside a few years, an' they'll be right out of luck."

Mattie required a new car and expensive furniture, also unlimited clothes.

"You can't live in a good house like this and go around in old rags," she pointed out. "And I've got to have a maid; it'd look fine me having to wash dishes, wouldn't it?"

So they secured Hulda. Hulda was short, but she had massive hips and a mighty chest. Her hair began at her eyebrows and the top of her flaxen head was

flat. She had tiny eyes of a very bright blue, a nose with huge nostrils and no bridge, and a mouth like a furnace door. She was not talkative, and seldom understood what was said to her, but she was energetic and possessed of a happy disposition.

Mattie, to show her authority and indulge a woman's natural propensity toward disorder, instructed her to clean house throughout, and went off to call on Mrs. Mobb-Widgley.

"I have a new maid," she announced proudly.

"Oh, you lucky girl," gushed Mrs. Mobb-Widgley. "A thing one does so miss out here is our well-trained English servants. I can't teach my servants anything, my dear, they're so horribly impudent. My last maid refused, absolutely refused, to wear a cap. When I told her she mustn't speak to her mistress in that tone, she said I could eat the cap, and marched out. Fancy! A thing like that wouldn't be allowed in England for a moment. I hope your girl won't be like that; nothing like putting them in their places to begin with."

Fortified with much good advice on the management of servants, but a little doubtful of its applicability, Mattie returned home. She heard a loud wailing noise through the open window, and peeped in. She saw the soles of a very large pair of shoes, thick legs in black woollen stockings, and an immense and rounded mass of blue print. Hulda was on her knees scrubbing, and as she scrubbed she sang.

The little tables were piled upon the new leather couch, the chairs upon the tables, and the carpet flung carelessly over the whole.

"O my God!" gasped Mattie. "Hulda, Hulda, you'll have all the varnish scraped off the furniture. And my new couch. Mercy, look at that tear."

"Har?" said Hulda, looking up with a grin.

"Dry up the floor and get those things down," begged Mattie. "Every piece of furniture in the place will be ruined."

"No matter, no matter," remarked Hulda placidly. "Get from my vay, I scropp."

She went on vigorously "scropping" with a big brush and singing her mournful ditty. Mattie went and sat helplessly in the kitchen. Hulda came out with her pail and brush, dropped them with a resounding crash, and returned to the sitting-room. There following a series of heavy thuds and thumps as she tossed the furniture about.

"All done now," she announced cheerfully. "Goot jop, har?"

"Yes, but please don't be so rough next time," said Mattie appealingly.

"Roff, no, no." Hulda shook her flaxen locks vigorously. "Me goot vorker—roff no."

Mattie talked to Ming about her for half the night.

"Well, get rid of her," he grumbled at last. "Only shut up, I want to go to sleep."

He was startled out of his slumbers by a most appalling noise, and leapt out of bed at a bound. He ran out on the landing and peered over the balusters. Hulda sat at the foot of the stairs with her big legs stretched out in front of her and her back against the wall.

"Did you hurt yourself?" he called down to her.

She blinked and began slowly to gather herself up. "I fall down dem gottam shteps," she grumbled. "Shleepry, shleepry like hell. Ooh, I break mine lek, bomp mine het, und two finkers break."

She hobbled off toward the kitchen, still growling. Ming dressed and hastened down in some anxiety, but she had recovered her good humour. She looked at him and her eyes began to twinkle and her mouth to widen. It spread until it reached from ear to ear, her lower jaw dropped, and from the awesome pink cavity so exposed there issued a laugh soon to be famous all along Hillcrest Drive.

"Hoooo. Hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo. Arrgh. Ah-ha-hahaha."

The house rocked upon its foundations, and the noise brought even the indolent Mattie out of bed.

"What's the matter, Bert? Whatever's the matter?"

"I don't know quite whether she's merely treating herself to a good laugh or only having a fit," he replied.

Presently he went up with Mattie's breakfast tray.

"What do you mean by engaging that cross between a she-buffalo and a laughing hyaena?" he demanded.

"Do you think this house is a menagerie?"

"But I had to have a maid," she protested. "She's the only white girl I could get: the others were two breed girls from across the river and a nigger wench. She's willing, Bert, and I'll teach her."

She flattered herself: she taught Hulda nothing, it was Hulda who took charge of the house. She was fond of hard work to an unfeminine extent, and though she was rough and somewhat destructive, she was specklessly clean and had such vague ideas of cookery as the average girl is able to master.

Ming became reconciled to everything but her laugh. He preferred her sometimes scorched steaks to the horrors Mattie had prepared during their first few days in the house.

He adopted to her a jocose air which she seemed to enjoy. "Hulda, you are a young lady of unusual charm and wit. Your beauty is compelling, and there are times when you so far forget yourself as to prepare a very good meal. But you must not laugh when I am in the house, it shatters my nervous system."

"Har," she replied with a broad grin.

She had a lover, a pale young man with a small head on the end of a long neck. He overtopped her by a foot, and walked beside her bending gracefully like a lily on its stalk. She loved him fiercely and demonstratively, while his attitude was timorous and defensive.

Ming was the unwilling witness of a love passage between them. They were walking on ahead of him in the long twilight, she with her arm about his waist, and halted at the gate. Ming hesitated, not wishing to disturb them.

She punched her lover affectionately. It was apparently a blow to the solar plexus, for the pale young man doubled up and coughed weakly. She was overwhelmed with remorse, and seizing him by both ears, kissed him resoundingly and repeatedly.

Ming cleared his throat loudly and made his heels ring on the cement walk. The man jerked free and stepped aside, staring at Ming with melancholy eyes.

"Better call it a night, Hulda," suggested Ming.

"Har? All right. Andy, I kees you." She kissed Andy three times explosively, and followed her employer meekly in.

The Pootles were giving a formal dinner-party as a house-warming. H. I. Pootle had devoted some thirty years to the acquisition of real estate in Gateway. All the money he had saved in a variety of small occupations had gone into the purchase of new land. For thirty years he had gone shabby and lived with his wife in a little, single-roomed shanty, waiting for the great boom to bring him wealth.

The great boom had come, and he was enjoying his wealth. He had turned an entire block at the end of Hillcrest Drive into a garden, and erected therein a house of staring red brick, rather larger than the city hall, in many ways the most imposing building in Gateway. Now he and his wife were celebrating their arrival at affluence by the most sumptuous entertainment yet offered by private individuals in the history of the town.

Ming had had several dealings with Hi Pootle, as he was universally called, and received an embossed and gilded card of invitation.

At Mattie's insistence and after some grumbling he had consented to buy himself a dress-suit. It set off his erect and slender figure to advantage, and Mattie observed with pride that her husband was distinguished looking. She herself, in yellow satin, was aware that she was looking her best.

She entered the pillared portico of the Pootle mansion with her head up, and encountered her hostess boldly

and for the first time. But she had no need to be afraid. Mrs. Pootle was no social warrior ; she had never studied the art of administering snubs, nor could she sneer or backbite or insinuate in the best social manner. She was a forthright, coarse, honest daughter of the backwoods, loving cheery laughter and easy informality.

She was a large woman with auburn hair and a wonderful collection of bronze freckles, a big mouth and a loud voice. She wore a very tight and low-cut dress of crimson silk and carried an immense fan of black ostrich feathers. Flashy jewellery twinkled all over her.

"Hello," she shouted. "Glad to see you, come right in an' set down awhile till dinner's ready. Got your appetites right with you, eh? That's right, I don't want you holdin' back when you pull up to the table."

"This way, this way, folks," said Hi Pootle, dancing nervously about them.

They looked at him in surprise. They knew him as a gaunt little man in shabby clothes and a heavy grey moustache. He now wore a dress-suit that was new and glossy, but extremely ill-fitting ; his white shirtfront bulged, and his bow-tie had worked under one ear. Most amazing of all, he had dyed his grey moustache and the narrow band of bushy hair surrounding his bald crown. These were now as black and glossy as a raven's plumage.

He led them into the drawing-room, where they found assembled most of the high society of Gateway. There were Judge and Mrs. Akenreid, Dr. Humphrey Maurois and his vivacious French wife, Canon and Mrs.

Hoddenway, and a miscellaneous mingling of old-timers and boomsters.

The person who most interested Ming was Kenkenake's new bride, whom he had met and married in Winnipeg after only a week's courtship. She was a little blonde thing with marvellous violet eyes. It seemed to Ming that such eyes must express a soul, and he felt reverent and abashed. He had learnt how little claim Mattie had to spirituality, but the old illusion still lingered wraithlike in the recesses of his heart.

The Mobb-Widgleys were the last to arrive. Mrs. Mobb-Widgley would have been chagrined if anyone had been later. But she received somewhat of a shock from her hostess. The hungry company, milling aimlessly in the drawing-room, heard Mrs. Pootle's powerful voice.

"Oh, you got here at last; I thought all the grub'd get cold waitin' on you. Hi, tell them birds in there to rustle the chuck, I'm starvin'."

Ming discovered with pleasure that he was to take in Mrs. Kenkenake. Mattie was assigned to Ben Oppenshaw, who had always admired her. Ming hoped that he would keep her occupied, for he had had experience enough of her jealousy.

Mrs. Kenkenake spoke in a soft drawl. She said, "te-aribly," and "just da-andy," and giggled. Ming began sadly to suspect that she was a fool.

He became aware that Mattie was watching him. She was neglecting Oppenshaw and staring across the table with a Lucrezia Borgia gleam in her eyes. He realized vaguely that she was capable of roasting harmless little Mrs. Kenkenake over a slow fire. He sighed; she would

be demanding explanations until far into the night, and Mrs. Kenkenake's company was not worth it. He decided fatalistically to enjoy himself while he might. Mrs. Pootle, at any rate, was worth listening to.

"Eat hearty," she directed, "I told O'Malley if anybody went away hungry from this house I'd have his heart out. This is no cup of tea and dog-meat sandwich layout."

The food was excellent and abundant. Conversation died down, for many of those present had taken the precaution to come fasting, and were in the mood to do full justice to the fare.

Even wine was served. No hostess had been bold enough to do such a thing in Gateway's history. The women looked at it doubtfully, and then glanced toward the upper end of the table where Mrs. Mobb-Widgley had her seat. They saw her holding her wine-glass daintily between finger and thumb, with the other fingers widely extended.

"No dinner at Home is complete without wine," she assured Mrs. Pootle graciously.

"Well, that's what they tell me," answered her hostess. "I says to Hi, I says, if we're goin' to do this thing, let's do it right. I don't like the taste of it myself—I'd as lief drink red ink—but if you're goin' to be high-toned, why, might as well make a good job of it."

The wine loosened tongues; laughter was heard. Mattie gulped down a second glass, gave Ming a minatory glare and opened a furious flirtation with Oppenshaw. Mrs. Kenkenake began to giggle continuously.

Mrs. Pootle beamed upon the company, and her voice dominated the table as she referred without mock modesty to her new prosperity.

"We was hard up long enough. Hi he had the soles of his shoes flappin' more often 'n not, an' I used to turn an' turn my old coats so often they faded six different colours. Now we got money, why wouldn't we enjoy ourselves?"

She broke off suddenly to glare at the caterer. "Say, here's half the gang settin' with their tongues hangin' out. Rustle some more of that wine."

New bottles appeared.

Mrs. Pootle went on to talk about clothes. She pointed to the crimson silk.

"When I first got into this here thing, I says to myself, 'Mary,' I says, 'one cough out of you an' under the table you go till they bring you a sheet—something'll split.' I hadn't had so much of me showin' since I was a young one, an' then it was mostly the other end."

Mrs. Mobb-Widgley's eyes rolled heavenward, and several of the company were seized with fits of choking.

Happily unaware of her enormity, Mrs. Pootle went cheerily on, "Hi he took a notion to paint himself. I'd liefer have him brindled like he was, but if it's high-toned to have tar on your mustash, why, go to it, I says."

"You seem to be enjoying your experiences, Mrs. Pootle," encouraged Ming.

"Why wouldn't I? Havin' the time of my young life, I am. Do you know there's four bathrooms in this

here house, four of 'em? I always done my bathin' in a tin tub in the kitchen Saturday nights, an' it seems kind of reckless to take a bath every day. I don't figure I get that dirty."

"Maybe the folks isn't so interested in the way we been livin', Mary," suggested her husband diffidently.

"Aw, g'wan with you. I like bein' high life, but I ain't goin' to pretend I always been high life. If we was to travel I might put on a pile of dog an' let on to be the King's aunt or something, but we couldn't get away with that here. They'd laugh at us, an' right too. But we're all friends here an' most of us has been through it."

She pointed her fork at Miss Daisy Locke, a prim and stiff-backed young lady, with a dead white complexion and supercilious eyebrows. "Eh, Daisy?"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Pootle?" drawled Miss Locke.

"I wonder if you remember when your ma'd ask me to save flour-bags for her to make little shimmies for you kids? Only most generally I needed all the flour bags I could get a-hold of to patch my own."

Miss Locke's face turned a rich crimson and tears of mortification came into her eyes.

"No, no, no," pursued Mrs. Pootle, "let's have a good time. Let's splash the money high, wide an' handsome now we got it, but what's the use pretendin' none of us never slep' in our underwear."

Many of those present were seized with helpless laughter, but Mrs. Mobb-Widgley seemed horrified, and all the attendant snobs felt it incumbent on them to be likewise.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Mobb-Widgley was not accustomed to wine. As an under-governess, a kind of glorified nursemaid, she had never had wine with her meals, and had indeed seldom drunk anything stronger than tea. She had a dim idea that she had been insulted, and strove to rise, but fell out of her chair upon the floor. She was removed in tears and an automobile, complaining bitterly that no one had ever understood or loved her.

That broke up the party, and the Mings walked home. Mattie was sullen, and Ming, with a premonition of what was to come, sought to amuse her.

"Still carrying on at Gride's, I see," he laughed, as they passed a brightly-lit house set back from the road in a grove of poplars.

"Better go on in," said Mattie sourly.

"Why, I'm no admirer of the fair lady's?"

"I wouldn't put it past you, the way you were carrying on to-night."

"Madam Pootle's wine doesn't seem to have agreed with you."

"That horrible, vulgar woman! I never was so ashamed in my life."

"A little bit free-spoken, but genuine. It's refreshing to meet somebody like her in this nest of little snobs."

"You would say that, being a poor scrub yourself. Poor Mrs. Mobb-Widgley, she's not used to hearing such talk; she'll have a terrible opinion of Canadians."

"The Widge was plain beastly drunk, and her opinion of Canadians don't matter."

"You would say dirty things about my friends."

They had reached home. Ming made haste to get to bed, but she trailed up and down, tossing her discarded garments recklessly about. Her face was flushed, and the two transverse wrinkles on the bridge of her nose indicated that her temper was badly out of hand.

Ming consoled himself for the coming storm by watching her. After all, she was beautiful, and consistent over-eating had not yet destroyed the lovely curves of her white body. She took her stand before the glass in a transparent lace night-dress, and began to comb out her hair with angry jerks. The possession of so much beauty, he felt, compensated for a few hours of storm at intervals.

"I wonder what you do with yourself when you're down town?" she inquired, fixing his reflection in the glass with a suspicious eye.

"I attend very strictly to business, my dear."

"That's what you say, but how do I know? If you'll start making love to a tow-headed little fool right in front of me, what'll you do when I'm not around?"

"Now, Mattie, don't be unreasonable. I'm not shirty about your flirting with Ben Oppenshaw."

"You don't need to be, and I'm not unreasonable, and if you loved me you wouldn't ever look at another woman, and I've a good notion to leave you, so I have. Right there before my face and all the other women looking on and grinning. They'll know what my husband thinks of me. I saw Mrs. Pootle grinning at you, the ugly old red-headed devil."

"Rather strong language for a lady of your social aspirations, don't you think, my dear?"

"Don't you make fun of me, Bert Ming, don't you dare. I want an explanation, and I'm going to have it. When did you meet that little fool?"

"Never saw her in my life before to-night."

"And yet you rush into each other's arms! Huh, I don't believe it. I want to know if you're in love with her."

"Well, that's easily answered, I'm not."

"I don't believe it. When are you going to see her again?"

"Don't know, and don't particularly care."

"I don't believe it. What were you saying to her? I want to hear every word?"

She got into bed and repeated her demand. It was useless for him to say he did not remember, she insisted that he must recollect. When he repeated such fragments of Mrs. Kenkenake's harmless and inane remarks as he could recall, she said again that she did not believe him.

"You're not telling me the real things she said. What did she say that she didn't want me to hear?"

"You could have listened to every word either of us said, and I wish to God you had," he groaned.

She wound her arms round his neck and burst into tears. Presently she wiped her eyes and became shrilly abusive. Thence she passed to coaxing and tender asseverations of her own undying fidelity to him, which led on to reproaches of his fickleness and more tears.

He got up at last, not having closed his eyes, and went down to where Hulda was giving her morning imitation of a busy day in a boiler factory. When he

came up again with Mattie's tray he found her sound asleep.

He shook his head at her with his smile very much awry. "Well, who wouldn't get a wife and live a happy life," he murmured, sighed, and slipped quietly away.

Julius Nenger shipped in several car-loads of lumber and a great many massive crates alleged to contain machinery, and had a gang of men busy erecting curious buildings of great size on the free site granted to him by the city across the river.

Work was proceeding on Thunder Falls, but the contractors were encountering terrible difficulties in getting a solid road across the muskeg, where they encountered soft slime to a depth of over thirty feet. Expenditures were running far ahead of estimates.

Building was going on in the town at an unprecedented rate ; it was fast losing its old haphazard, cheery, down-at-heel, frontier appearance, and growing to resemble Dogtown more and more every day. There was a perfect flood of immigrants, going out to the new lands across the river opened up by the railway, and their equipment and supply made retail business good in town.

The Gateway Club was formally opened with great splendour. A determined effort was made by the ladies to participate. Each husband was told by a basilisk-eyed wife that if he did not bring back an invitation for her she would give more than her usual thought to her chosen task of making his life a little Gehenna.

Each husband meekly promised obedience : each husband, once at the club, sternly voted for the total

exclusion of women: each husband returned home, abject but resigned, explained that he had been outvoted, and took his inevitable scolding with abased head, but with a fearful joy in his heart.

The bachelors viewed these proceedings with wonder and an unholy joy.

The house committee, having money on hand, ordered an entire car-load of champagne from a Montreal firm of importers.

"For the love of Mike," roared Borowdell, charging into the Board of Trade offices with his eyes bulging. "See here, these shysters have shipped us two car-loads of champagne."

"Well, they have their nerve right with 'em," commented Rates. "Shoot the second car right back at their expense, we never ordered it."

But an idea smote Wofflin. "We don't have to pay for that second car till we get damn good and ready," he said. "Ain't that so, Huck?"

"Yes."

Wofflin brought his keglike fist down on the table. "Take her, that's what I say. Let's show 'em. Can Dogtown do a thing like that? One car-load for one-horse towns like Dogtown, but two car-loads ain't any too much for Gateway."

The idea was adopted with enthusiasm; there was nothing cheap about Gateway in those great days.

The dinner was sumptuous, and then champagne and oratory began to flow together. Ming forgot himself; he felt it would be criminal to throw away that regal wine. He had intended to drink with moderation, but champagne is insidious; it winks at you, it prickles

delightfully in the throat, and the empty glass cries to be refilled.

He found himself in a region of golden dreams, and the desire came upon him to communicate his felicity to his fellow-men. Each individual fellow-man was experiencing simultaneously similar emotions. The occasion became an informal Board of Trade meeting, and many brilliantly worded resolutions of wide import were proposed. Not all were seconded, but all were carried unanimously, and their health drunk with cheers in brimming bumpers of champagne. Unhappily, no minutes were kept, and the resolutions were irretrievably lost.

Ming became aware of a certain discontinuity. He had just now, it seemed, been addressing a circle of happy faces. The sudden change to a dull and misty dawn, a disordered table on a level with his eyes, and certain supine figures on the floor, seemed to indicate a hiatus in consciousness.

The club members, dauntless warriors as they were, lay where they had fallen. The club servants had also been betrayed by the subtle wine, and their snores came faintly from the kitchen beyond.

Ming had apparently reached a couch—he could not recollect how—and stared down into the upturned face of Borowdell, crimson and open-mouthed. Alderman Straike had taken the precaution to remove his shoes before curling up like a grey-whiskered kitten on the carpet.

Ming encountered the boiled and slightly strabismic eyes of Little Willie Bee, whose chin rested on the arm of a big leather armchair, and whose every wiry hair stood straight on end.

"It appears to have been a fine large party," he remarked with a painful smile.

"Feel's as if I'd been dead an' dug up," moaned Little Willie.

"Glad champagne never gives a fellow a headache," continued Ming thoughtfully, "because if I hadn't been drinking champagne I'd say I had the devil's own headache. Must have been the liqueur brandy. My mouth feels as if I'd been drinking sulphuric acid out of a copper spoon. Ugh."

"Where've you been all night?" demanded Mattie, "I've been just about out of my mind worrying about you."

A score of other wives were asking the same question that morning, with the same uncompromising glare, and receiving approximately the same excuses with the same expressions of dissatisfaction.

Bachelors are spared these things.

The club became a sure refuge for two classes of men: those whose wives wished to see too much of them, and those whose wives wished to see too little.

In old communities where men are relatively scarce, woman is more or less compelled to restrain any polyandrous instincts she may have: to keep her harpoon firmly fixed in one victim is a task requiring all her attention.

But Gateway was full of unattached, young and vigorous men, with plenty of money and a yearning for feminine society. Inevitably, perhaps, several Gateway ladies acquired a circle of loyal and generous men friends.

There was, in particular, Mrs. Gride, youthful, pretty, charming and with expensive tastes. Jimmy Gride could

not support her in the style she desired, and she permitted other men to supply the deficiency. His protests were met by an invitation to go and play by himself.

He spent most of his waking hours at the club, drinking in morose solitude, while his wife danced and played cards and rode in automobiles with a succession of cavaliers. She also gave evening parties in the house among the poplars which were always lively and often riotous.

"Poor old Jimmy," rumbled Wofflin in one of his lucid moments. "See what it is to be married. Has to spend all day down here so he can't see what his wife's up to, an' go home so pickled at night that he don't give a damn. You mark my words, though, he'll bust everything loose one of these days."

CHAPTER XV

YET on Kenkenake marriage had an excellent effect; he and his fluffy-headed little wife were the most devoted pair in town. One of them was hardly ever to be seen without the other. Kenkenake stopped drinking altogether, and his melancholy and diffident manner was replaced by one of quiet but cheerful self-confidence.

Wives held him up to their husbands for emulation, but one much harassed husband countered effectively with, "If I had a nice young, pretty, good-tempered wife I'd be crazy about her too."

Mrs. Mobb-Widgley strove unweariedly, but nothing could keep Gateway's social life in order. There could be no standard of family, culture and good breeding. Family was ruled out because many people could not name their grandparents, and others did not care to. Culture does not spring up spontaneously among kitchen-dwellers and knife-swallowers by immediate inheritance, and so culture would not do.

In a democracy, on the other hand, it is generally conceded that a man with a thousand dollars is just ten times as good as a man with only a hundred, and snobbery endorses the verdict. This is a simple way of estimating social worth, but money does not invariably find its way into the hands of the worthiest; occasionally, alas, even

the unworthy acquire wealth. And morals cannot be wholly ignored even in boom times.

The trouble was that any attempt to boycott Mrs. Gride led to an organized strike of the bachelors. Besides, she devoutly took her partially sobered husband to church every Sunday. Canon Hoddenway, a pure man to whom all things were pure, shook hands with her as the congregation filed out, and smiled with mild benignity when he encountered her at church socials, an old-time social function that still lingered on in the town.

Mrs. Gride simply had to be received, and that involved receiving Mrs. Whaip, who was only less notorious because she was not so good-looking, and had fewer gentlemen friends. Even Mrs. Start managed to hang precariously upon the outskirts, though she and her husband had been up in police court in consequence of a small street riot staged by them over another man.

It was common knowledge that Sam Beaver and Tom Watts had exchanged wives over the week-end, but that was considered to be going a little too far, and others hesitated to follow their example.

Then there were Mrs. Teevan and Miss Gomphrey, who played bridge, and who, when they happened to be partners—which happened quite often—swept everything before them. Nearly every unoccupied lady in Gateway lost money to them at one time or another, and they held I.O.U.'s that were extremely useful for blackmailing purposes.

High society was convulsed for a time by Mrs. Ickley, wife of a bank manager. She had been Katie Kidgick,

bare-legged, pretty and rather promiscuous daughter of a drunken plasterer, but her husband was, *ex officio*, of the *haut ton*, and she had to be received in the end.

The charming Mrs. Boddavy was rumoured not to be legally married to Charlie Boddavy, and her extreme circumspection of behaviour lent some colour to the suspicion. She was, in fact, perhaps the best-behaved woman in Gateway at that period.

Ming, in an unwise moment, laid upon Mattie the charge that she was to have nothing to do with the more notorious ladies.

"I don't care tuppence who receives them," he said. "Damn it, there has to be a line drawn somewhere. I won't have my wife running about with all the draggletails in town."

Mattie did not protest, which was, if he had known it, a most ominous sign. He went away satisfied with having exerted his authority, and forgot about it. He had his own worries; real estate was inexplicably quiet, there did not seem much sale for shares in wild-cat enterprises, and even the mortgage loan business was falling off badly, as the mortgage companies began to find difficulty in collecting their interest.

He had spent all his ready cash in a car and furniture for the house, and in trying to meet Mattie's insatiable demands for new clothes, and his realizable assets did not inspire confidence in his bank manager when he applied for a loan.

Also he was beginning to suspect that his fellow aldermen were not as single-minded as himself in their desire for Gateway's future greatness. It seemed that

Borowdell was little better than a rogue, and most of the others not above suspicion of self-seeking.

He came to have a new respect for wizened little Alderman McGregor, entrenched behind his spectacles, and fighting with quiet pertinacity for sound finance and honest administration.

Knowland managed to have passed an item for the grading of a street and the laying of a cement walk to his new house. There was no real need for this work, for the mayor's house was the only one upon the street.

Borowdell was getting a lot of work done in the east end, where he had extensive interests, and Rates was demanding drainage of a large swamp in the west end, which would benefit nobody so much as himself.

When Ming fought these appropriations in council, he found Thunder Falls blocked by a coalition of Knowland, Rates and Borowdell, acting with the official opposition of McGregor and Straike.

He had to withdraw his opposition or see his favourite project wrecked. Thunder Falls had become an abyss ; it had already absorbed the debentures raised for its construction, much of the money raised for a trunk sewer, and was calling for more. Another debenture issue would have to be floated or the work halted.

"No good your kickin', Duke," said Borowdell, "you're askin' more money for your damned falls than all the rest of us put together. The east end needs those services, and either it gets 'em or Thunder Falls can go to hell."

"But, man, if the job's shut down the town's ruined. Can't you see that ?"

"I'll see the town ruined before I see myself ruined," was Borowdell's cynical reply. "I'm not in Gateway for my health, and if things don't pick up around here pretty soon we'll all be belly-up, anyway. Well, take it or leave it, you get my vote on the debenture issue when I get yours on the east end."

Ming retired to his office to meditate on the trials of statesmanship and the penalties of altruism.

His telephone rang. A mocking feminine voice said, "Hello, Mr. Ming, Mrs. Gride speaking. Mrs. Ming is here."

"I beg your pardon," stiffly.

"Oh yes, she came to my bridge tea, but she don't seem quite herself. Perhaps you'd better come for her."

"Is she ill?"

"Best come see for yourself." A malicious giggle and a jarring crash at his ear as she slammed down the transmitter.

Divided between anger, curiosity and alarm, he rushed out to his car. As he drew up before the house among the poplars and hurried up the walk, he could hear the phonograph grinding out dance music. The door stood open and he hurried in without knocking.

In the middle of the floor stood Mattie, a fixed and foolish smile on her face; with arms outspread she moved her body jerkily and shuffled her feet in a manner imitative of a dance not usually performed in polite circles. The room was full of women with mocking or scornful faces.

"Ooh, it's Bert," she babbled at sight of him. "See me dance, Bert. Look, see me dance."

He took her firmly by the arm. "Come along with me," he said in a low but commanding voice. "Never mind anything else."

She protested feebly, swaying on her feet, but he picked her up bodily and bore her swiftly to the car. Hulda was helpful, and between them they got her to bed. As he sat by her side, angry and bitterly ashamed, he heard a horrible noise rising from below. It was Hulda laughing in the kitchen.

It was not until the next day that he was able to get an explanation from Mattie.

"She gave me a little teeny glass of some green stuff, pepperminty but awful nice. She said it wouldn't hurt me if I drank all I wanted."

"Who did?"

"Mrs. Gride. And I had four glasses, and then they put the phonograph on and asked me to dance for them."

"But where did you pick up that putrid dance?"

"I don't know. Oh yes, Mrs. Gride showed me, and asked me could I do it."

"That slut ought to be flogged at the cart-tail," said Ming. "She deliberately got you drunk on creme de menthe and put you up to make a spectacle of yourself. What do you mean by going there anyhow, after what I told you?"

"I told her you didn't want me to go, but she coaxed and coaxed and said you'd never know, and I was all alone in the house with nowhere to go, and it was so dull. You shouldn't be so mean to me, Bert. I've got such an awful headache. And I lost all my money to that horrible Mrs. Teevan, and I wish I was dead."

"That's the curse of this town; it's crawling with idle females with nothing to do but get into mischief. Look here, Mattie, you're to stay away from those vulture hags in future, do you understand? I mean it, I won't put up with it."

"Yes, I will. I promise I will. But don't be mean to me, Bert, I can't bear it. I feel awful. Will you give me some money, Bert? Mrs. Teevan and Miss Gomphrey got all I had."

"I'll give you some money when I get it, and you'll take some care of what I give you after this."

"I don't think you're a bit nice to me, it wasn't my fault. It's all that horrible Mrs. Gride, and I'll never speak to her again as long as I live. You ought to have told me what kind of a woman she was."

Feeling weary, disheartened and disgusted, Ming went out for a ramble along the Sweetwater to wrestle with his latest problem.

"I'm afraid I know enough of Mattie by now to be certain she didn't tell me all the truth. I wonder how many lies she's told me since I met her? No use going into that, I suppose; the thing to do is to see that she doesn't tell me any more.

"This whole town's rotten: it seems that every man I meet is a shyster and every woman a bitch. My God, I never used to think so badly of human kind. Damned if I don't begin to believe that old pessimist Curtis was right, and that there is some poison in a boom that turns people into swine.

"I wonder if Mattie has been carrying on with other men: that would put the lid on it. No, I'd better not

think of that—that sort of thing ends up in an asylum. Still, I wonder what I'd do if I found out she'd been on the loose. Stop it, Duke, she's your wife. You've no damn business to suspect her until you have proof that you can't ignore. Perhaps a man can't trust any woman, but he simply has to. No, I won't spy on her; if she's going to the bad, she'll go in spite of anything I can do. I'll give her the benefit of the doubt. What a rotten business life is."

No one said anything to him directly about Mattie's exploit, but he was soon convinced by looks he intercepted that the story was all over town, and that it had lost nothing in the telling.

"You'd better live a reformed and cloistered life for a bit, young lady," he advised her.

"Oh, but there's a big dance on at the new assembly hall on Thursday, Bert. You promised you'd take me, you know you did."

"Better give it a bye, old girl."

"But you promised you'd take me. I never get any fun. It's all right for you down town, sitting around and drinking and talking all day long, but I'm alone up here in this little hole all day long."

"Well, if you've no sense of shame . . ."

"Why, the idea, what have I to be ashamed of? It wasn't my fault at all, it was all that miserable Mrs. Gride. You're just trying to back out of taking me, that's what it is."

"All right, little brazen-face."

The new assembly hall had just been completed, a fine spacious room, and this was the opening dance. In contrast to two short years ago, when evening

dress had been all but unknown in the town, all the men were in clawhammers and starched shirt-fronts, and all the women in evening gowns imitated from Paris.

As the Mings entered from the lobby, they encountered the Mobb-Widgleys face to face. Mrs. Mobb-Widgley's long nose lifted and swung, and they found themselves gazing at the little buttonlike knobs of her spine between her scrawny shoulder-blades as she moved away. The cut direct.

Mattie turned pale. "Did you see that? Did you see that, Bert? Oh, what shall I do?"

Ming ground his teeth. "Sit down here," he rasped, "until I come for you. Stay there."

He put her in a chair in a corner and stalked away, very stiff-legged. He soon saw Mobb-Widgley alone and bore down upon him. Mobb-Widgley looked decidedly nervous, and his eyeglass fell out of his eye three times in succession.

"Could I have a moment of your time, Mr. Mobb-Widgley?" asked Ming, the suavity of his tone belied by the fixed and steely glitter in his eye.

"Why—er—ah, yes, certainly, Mr. Ming."

"This way," said Ming, steering him urgently into the cloak-room.

"What I wanted to ask you, Mr. Mobb-Widgley, is whether you know the Earl of Oxminster's butler."

Mobb-Widgley's eyeglass tinkled down for the fourth time.

"I understand," went on Ming pitilessly, "that he has a son somewhere out here, married to an under-housemaid or a scullery wench of sorts. I'm going to

make a few inquiries here and there, but I thought I'd ask you first."

Mobb-Widgley cleared his throat hard, and gripped his eyeglass heroically in a painfully screwed-up face.

"May I, may I—er—ah—inquire," he stammered, "what business it is of yours?"

"Simply that the Earl of Oxminster is my cousin, and his butler made inquiries of my father. I knew all about you a year ago."

"Oh," said Mobb-Widgley faintly, and became limp.

"Quite," said Ming. "I didn't see that it was any business of mine to mention it. Of course, if it becomes my business . . ."

He nodded curtly and turned away, but he was smiling when he rejoined the disconsolate Mattie.

"Buck up, old girl, and I think you will shortly witness a public exhibition of the unspeakable Widge eating crow. I think so."

He was watching Mobb-Widgley break through the group that surrounded his wife, and carry her off. Presently the couple reappeared.

"We will now resume our promenade," said Ming. "Get up, Mattie."

"You're not going back to her," she whimpered. "Don't, Bert. I couldn't bear her to do that again. Take me home."

"She won't do it again."

The couples neared, not by any means unobserved. Almost every neck in the room was craned, for Mrs. Mobb-Widgley had made no secret of her opinion of Mattie's recent behaviour. But one cannot be even a super-excellent snob without possessing certain admirable

qualities. Mrs. Mobb-Widgley knew how to take defeat gracefully.

She gave a start, and her mouth stretched wide in a multi-toothed smile. She swooped, her hand flapping at the end of her arm on a level with her eyes.

"Oh, my de-ar Mrs. Ming, here you are at last," she cooed in her most liquid gurgle. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

That autumn actual hunger began to menace the boomsters. There was still plenty of work for those who were willing to work, but for the gentlemen who lived by their wits the present was dark and the outlook darker.

Those who had left steady jobs to engage in the great gamble regretted their precipitancy, and the fortunate ones got their jobs back. Others sought new jobs, but employment was decreasing also, and they soon glutted the market. N.S.F. cheques became a plague, and kited paper fluttered from bank to bank. Merchants began sadly to con lists of bad debts, swearing to give no more credit to anyone.

Ming felt the pinch as hard as anyone. The loan business had now disappeared, and all his efforts brought him in only the most meagre income from the writing of fire insurance. Even the three dollars he received for attending each council meeting was now very welcome, and he would run about town a whole day in order to split a ten-dollar commission with some equally impoverished fellow boomster.

The real estate men simply could not bring themselves to face the situation. They gathered disconsolately at

the club, where champagne no longer flowed like water. The Montreal importers were bemoaning the aggressive business enterprise that had led them to ship the second car of the wine unasked, and were threatening legal proceedings to recover their money.

A dozen were gathered in the club one day, coldly and dismally sober, for a round of drinks had become almost an event.

"It ain't as if property was really high," mourned Oppenshaw, "it's come down a lot from the peak. A man with a little money now could step right in an' pick up a bunch of real snaps."

"That's a fact," agreed Borowdell eagerly. "He might have to hold on for a little until the next upward swing, but pretty near all the property in town is held below fair market value at this minute."

"Well, I've sunk a lot of money in the blinkin' town," grumbled Thwaite. "Wish I could see any way of getting some of it back."

Ham Wofflin had been awesomely sober of late, and given to weighty and oracular pronouncements.

"The market's just restin'," he insisted in his hoarse bellow. "I tell you, boys, she's just restin'. She'll wake up an' take a big jump one day, an' you fellers don't want to be caught asleep at the switch. I can see it comin'."

"It's bound to pick up soon," chattered Little Willie. "It stands to reason." And he proceeded to parade all the old moth-eaten reasons.

They listened and agreed eagerly with him. Inwardly, they were afraid and sick at heart, and so ready to snatch at any straw of hope. Ming, sitting silent, remembered

Curtis' grim prophecy of ten or twenty lean years to come, and feared the shrewd American was right.

"Well, well, here's Kicky Kenkenakes," burst out Oppenshaw suddenly. "Not often we see you around here these days. Got the price of a drink in your clothes, it's an awful dry fall in these parts?"

Kenkenake's vast jaw was very conspicuous and his brows were drawn down until they hid his deep-set eyes. "Haven't had a drink in a month," he said in a dull voice. "Thought I'd drop in an' see what was doin'. Guess it's my turn to stand my hand."

They greeted the announcement with cheers. The round of drinks put new courage into their hearts, and they sat late. Occasionally a man drifted in with a little loose change in his pocket and a few drinks circulated, but Kenkenake, having stood his round, went on buying drinks for himself, and consuming them in morose silence.

Mattie was spending the evening with Mrs. Mobb-Widgley, whither Ming always refused to accompany her, and so he stayed and looked on, cracking an occasional joke. No one pressed drinks on him in these lean days, and he had no difficulty in making a single whisky last him all evening.

Quantock, manager of the local branch of the Commercial Bank, dropped in at his usual hour. He was a bow-legged man with no neck and a face broader than it was long. He was also a redoubtable drinker who seldom went to bed sober.

The quality that made him remarkable was that he had two separate and distinct manners. In the evening he was the friend of all the world, would listen to tales

of woe with keen sympathy, and promise loans with the utmost recklessness. But in the morning, at the bank, he was eminently professional, sober, sour, serious and cruelly suspicious.

To hopeful borrowers, reminding him of overnight promises, he invariably replied, "What I say after business hours don't count; when I have a few drinks in me I'm liable to say anything. Now I'm talking business: what security have you for this loan?"

To Ming, watching him keenly in his hours of unbuttoned ease, there came a sinister idea. He looked about him for a confederate, and decided upon Kenkenake as the man most to be trusted for discretion and honesty.

"Come along, Kicky," he said, "time old married men like us were toddling home."

Kenkenake came readily, for he liked and trusted Ming, and they had had many dealings together in brighter days so recently past. He was not quite drunk, but he had reached the expansive mood when a man talks freely about his misfortunes.

He began to speak at once of his mother-in-law. "I won't say a word against her, Duke, everybody says she's so sweet. Dilly always says her mother is so sweet—never cranky. She thinks her mother's one of God's own angels. She goes around sheddin' sweetness an smiles, an' she's never said a mean word to me."

"Well, it's pleasant to be on such good terms with your mother-in-law."

"Can't be on any other terms with her. You've seen her, eh? Always around with Dilly every place."

Ming faintly recalled an elderly and angular female, somewhat gone in the knees, with a pair of cold eyes above a fixed and doglike grin.

"Yes, I believe I have."

"Well, you can believe I have. She's been livin' on me for a month now, an' don't show any signs of movin' yet. I'm on good terms with her all right, but let me tell you something, Duke, just one little thing: I hate the old hellcat."

"But why?"

"You ain't got a mother-in-law, eh? Listen: I'm not a spiteful man, nor a mean man, nor a cheap man, and I don't know that I ever hated anybody in my life before. But, listen to me, I'll shoot as many mother-in-laws as anybody'll give me a license to."

"What appears to be the trouble?"

"It's business bein' on the bum. No money. Not that the old devil ever had a nickel in her measly life: Dilly was a hat check girl in a 'Peg hotel, an' her mother kept roomers. But she figured I was rich. No sooner did we get settled than she sold out her furniture, an' plunked herself right down on us. She don't loosen up a nickel of her own money, just lives on me."

He nodded vigorously and stepped off the walk into the gutter. The jolt snapped his jaws shut, and Ming shot out a hand just in time to save him from a fall.

"Thanks, Duke, guess I must have taken a drink too much." He lifted his voice passionately. "Can you blame me? Dilly an' me, just us two, why we was as happy as heaven on a bright day. And then this damned old jaybird has to show up and ruin it all. Dilly's the

sweetest kid in the whole world, but she hasn't much sense. She believes everything that old circus ape tells her. Mommer says this, mommer says that. Mommer says if I cared for her I'd get her a new dress, mommer says what the house needs is a new dojigger.

"I'd throw her out an' break her miserable old neck only for Dilly. You can't fight with her—she's too slick for that. She won't say anything to me: no, but she gets Dilly in a corner an' poisons her mind against me. And you know how business is; I ain't made fifty dollars all month. But you can't make Dilly believe that, or her damned mother.

"Do you know what the old body-snatcher put in her mind? She believes I'm givin' money to other women. You know me, Duke; you know the kind of a man I am. You never saw me look at another woman since I first seen Dilly. I just don't see 'em, Dilly's enough for me. No wonder I'm drinkin' again. I wonder I don't go out of my mind."

"That is pretty rotten, old man," commiserated Ming. "But, I say, how about our working a little rag on old Quantock between us and getting him to discount our notes? Then you'd have some money, and everything in the garden'd be lovely."

Kenkenake stared at him, rocking a little on his feet, and shook his head heavily. "Naw. Crazy. You can't get any money out of Quantock. I've struck him twice myself, and he turned me down cold both times."

"You tackled him when he was sober."

"He's always sober in business hours, it's the only time he is sober."

“ Well, but listen to me, I’ve an idea. It’s a bright and golden idea if it only works, and I think we can work it between us.”

Kenkenake listened. He was extremely dubious, but in the mood to clutch at any straw, and by the time Ming parted with him at his own door they had come to an agreement.

CHAPTER XVI

KENKENAKE was sober, gloomy and sceptical on their next encounter. "Nothing doin', the notion's crazy. Old Quantock's too cunnin'."

"He's only cunning when he's sober; he's naturally rather thick-headed, but he was well trained by the bank. Keep him oiled and he's yours."

"But how'm I goin' to stay out all night?" objected Kenkenake. "I haven't done such a thing since I got married. I got the devil for bein' out so late last time. The only thing that saved me was that I was half-shot. Funny thing about Dilly, she don't seem to care about my drinking, all she worries about is other women."

"Well, this thing's got nothing to do with women."

"But what am I goin' to tell her. I don't like lyin' to her?"

"You'll get over that, it's a wicked waste of a good thing to tell a woman the truth. Look here, dearly beloved, as long as you take home the bacon, as they say out here, your wife'll forgive you a couple of million lies."

"Well, I don't know, I'm worried sick. I don't believe we can put it through."

"Oh, of course if you're a bloated millionaire and know where you can pick up shekels by the bucketful, go along. But I'm desperate, I'd cut a throat for a

ha'penny. I'm out for piracy on the high seas or anything else required. If I can't get anybody I can trust, I'll tackle it on my own."

"You really mean it, Duke?"

"Conquer or die's my motto, young feller me lad. Quantock's going to get all the free drinks the hog can hold."

"Well, damn it, I can't be any worse off than I am," said Kenkenake recklessly. "Count me in on this."

"Hurrah! hoist the Jolly Roger and bear away for the Commercial Bank."

Between them they got Quantock sodden drunk that night at the Club.

"Come along, old man, we'll see you home," said Ming soothingly.

They took the bank manager between them, his legs describing erratic arcs, and the trio reeling from side to side as they went down the street.

Ming was coldly sober and determined, but Kenkenake was not in a great deal better condition than Quantock.

"Here we are, old man," he said.

"Zhish ishn' 'ome," protested Quantock.

"No, no, but you need something to sober you up, then we'll take you home. Mind the stairs, old man. Lift your feet, that's right. Here we are; sit down here until I mix you a little brightener."

The bank manager sank into a chair in Ming's office. Kenkenake dropped into another, laid his head on the desk and fell asleep. Ming mixed a stiff drink out of the special supply he had laid in for the purpose, and virtually forced it down Quantock's throat.

The bank manager retained only one idea in his muddled brain, and that was to get home, and all night long Ming beguiled him with ingenious reasons why he should stay where he was, and plied him with drinks. Once Quantock got resolutely upon his feet and had to be hauled back by main force.

Later he showed a tendency to sink into a stupor, but that would not do, for he had to be sufficiently sober in the morning to be taken to the bank. By heroic measures—best not described—Ming revived him.

Dawn came at last. People began to move about on the street below. Ming looked at his watch, the banks were about to open. He shook Kenkenake awake.

"Take a nip of this," he said peremptorily. "Pull yourself together, chappie, the dread and doomsome hour has struck."

Kenkenake took the drink meekly and a spark came into his fishy eyes.

"Now, make out your note for two thousand dollars and I'll back it. Then you back my note."

"Two thousand," gasped Kenkenake, "he'll never take 'em."

"We'll try anyhow, may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb."

Quantock looked like a galvanized corpse, but Ming's will dominated him. As meekly as a child he permitted himself to be washed and brushed, and swallowed the stiff drink handed him.

The entrance of the three into the bank caused a sensation, but no one thought of questioning Quantock's orders. Still in a dazed condition he accepted the two notes, and the pair made haste to get the money.

"Now, what in hell will I tell Dilly?" groaned Kenkenake.

"Go home," snarled Ming, suddenly sick, unutterably weary and ashamed. "Tell your wife any lie you choose: you'll never hear anything but lies from her. Tell her you made two thousand dollars by your night's work; any woman'd forgive you ten murders for that."

Kenkenake left him, and as he stumbled homeward he mused bitterly, "I'm a damned rogue, a cad, no better than a common swindler. But I've got a wife to keep. Arrgh, that's just an excuse. My God, I thought I was one of the few men in this town who was still half decent."

Mattie met him with a machine-gun barrage of questions, but she had taught him cunning. If a wife can't teach her husband to lie convincingly he is hopeless.

"Been sitting up drinking with a couple of damn fools, and I'm dead on my feet. But I made a few dollars out of it, and a man has to do anything he can nowadays to get money."

"Ooh, Bert, that's lovely. You know I'm broke, honey, flat busted to the world. Could you give me twenty dollars?"

"Great Jupiter, woman, you reduce me to beggary. Well, here's twenty, and don't ask me for any more for a month."

"No, honey, I won't, but I really ought to have a couple of new dresses. I haven't a thing fit to wear. I'm afraid this twenty won't go very far."

"You'll have to stretch it, old woman, or we'll both be going about in sack-cloth before spring."

"But——"

"I'm going to bed, I'm worn out."

As he stretched his weary limbs under the cool sheets and drew the blankets up under his chin, he thought drowsily, "Better not tell her how much I got, she'll only pester the life out of me. It'll probably be all we have to live on this winter, and I'll have to hang tight to every penny. Surely, surely, things'll pick up in the spring."

On the following morning, Quantock rang him up on the telephone, and asked him to call round. The bank manager gazed at him glumly. "You played a dirty trick on me night before last, Duke. I didn't think you were that kind of man."

"Somebody had to do it sooner or later, old boy, and I thought it was about time you kept some of your bally promises."

Quantock became pathetic. "Well, it's a joke for you maybe, but I'll catch the devil from head office. This is no time for a man to be out of a job. Can't you give me a little collateral against the note?"

"Easiest thing in the world. I've heaps of collateral. I'll be back in a minute."

He returned to lay before the bank manager his title to the under-water lots in Lakeview Heights, and a number of nicely engraved stock certificates in gold, silver, copper and iron mines, oil wells and various factories-to-be.

"This stuff is worth about two cents on the dollar at a liberal valuation," groaned Quantock. "My God, haven't you anything else?"

"All I have, old man."

"What about your house?"

"Mortgaged to the eaves."

"A chattel mortgage on your furniture?"

"No," said Ming firmly, "that belongs to my wife. It's about all I have to leave her if anything happens to me."

"I'll have to go on the water wagon," concluded Quantock mournfully. "Anyway, I'll never take another drink with you."

Winter arrived as it does in the West, with a whoop. The earth became a frozen corpse, decently shrouded in snow; the sparkling river crept into its prison under the ice; and great winds roared across the valley and smote the exposed and flimsy new bungalows on Hillcrest Drive. The view remained beautiful when one could see through the frost-coated windows, but aestheticism dies down in shivering people.

All Gateway felt exposed and frostbitten. In the old days there had been little style but much comfort, now there was plenty of style but comfort had fled. People wore clothing imitated from the mild climates of London and Paris, and inhabited houses imitated from the still milder climate of California. They froze. Worst chill of all was poverty, for no man can feel warm with empty pockets.

The city could sell no more debentures, nor raise the money to pay the interest due on those already sold, for the bulk of the taxes remained unpaid. The harassed council discussed wild and nebulous plans, and made anxious and futile attempts to dispose of the uncompleted works at Thunder Falls.

The once busy little offices of the boomsters were abandoned one by one, standing cold and empty with their flamboyant canvas advertisements of Prospect Gardens, Desirable Grove, and the like, broken down by the snow and fluttering in the icy winds. Hundreds of people slipped away unostentatiously, leaving behind them angry and despairing creditors. Rents became uncollectable.

Deepest of all was the woe on Millionaire Avenue. Fuel was dear and houses hard to heat : all dinners and dances ceased. Mrs. Pootle, with unfeminine frankness, made no secret of the fact that she had closed up the whole of her huge house except the kitchen and the room adjoining.

"It's a fine summer house," she said, "but in winter I'd liefer live in a barn."

Ming found Mattie in tears one day. "Hulda says she's going, Bert ; her feller's going to marry her and take her out on his homestead."

"Good for the laughing hippotamus ; she's saved me the trouble of sacking her."

"But what'll I do without a maid ? I can't take care of a big house like this."

"Rot, it'll do you good ; you're getting fat, and need a little exercise."

"You're a heartless brute ; everybody has a maid."

"Not by a jugful ; there are only about ten people left in town with money enough to keep a servant. Has the Widge got one ?"

"No-o, she says she can't get one to suit her."

"Aha, the Widge is hard-up ; there's too much of the old butler's money tied up in frozen real estate."

"Is Mr. Mobb-Widgley a butler?"

"No, no, he's not, but—he looks like one, don't he?"

"Oh, you're always making fun of my friends. But I must have another maid."

"It breaks my heart to refuse you, dearest, but there ain't agoin' to be no maid in thisyere house. That's good Canadianese, isn't it? Golly, I am picking up the language."

She grumbled, but had to submit. Ming did most of their cooking, for a man picks up cookery much quicker than a woman, and Mattie's indifference to the taste of what she ate as long as there was plenty of it was appalling.

The city council received a notice from the bondholders of the Stupendous Manufacturing Company of Gateway, Limited, that the half-yearly interest on the bond issue had not been met, and calling on the city, as guarantors, for the money.

"Does anyone know where Nenger is?" queried Alderman McGregor, his eyes twinkling mockingly at his unhappy colleagues behind his thick spectacles.

Nobody had any certain knowledge. Mr. Nenger had given out that he was going to Montreal to see his directors. It was two months since he had left town, and no word had been received from him. Work at the factory across the river had long been suspended.

"There must be some misunderstanding," said Knowland feebly.

"I'd like to remind the council that I voted against guaranteeing those bonds," croaked McGregor.

"Must be some misunderstanding," reiterated the mayor.

But in the hearts of the council there lay like lead the dismal conviction that there was none.

Mr. Nenger was not located; it appeared that he had gone south for his health, and it was rumoured that he had been seen recuperating at Palm Beach. The massive packing-cases he had shipped in were opened, and discovered to contain various machines of antique pattern, worth perhaps three cents a pound as old iron.

These revelations sealed the doom of the council. Knowland refused to stand for re-election. Ming's term of office had still one year to run, but his colleagues were swept away, even including the acrid McGregor.

The old-timers returned to power under Mayor Smithers, a solemn and conscientious old Lancashireman with mutton-chop whiskers and a slight stammer. Old Johnny Cramp would have rejoiced to see himself so justified, but he had suffered an apoplectic stroke on the night of the famous meeting, and was now a living corpse.

Mayor Smithers announced his policy as retrenchment and reform, but there was nothing to retrench and reforms seemed hopeless. The rest of the council were bewildered by the mess they found themselves expected to clean up, and united only in hatred of the former council and all its works. No one now saluted Ming as Duke of Gateway.

The next item of interest in the sad tale of the town's downfall was Borowdell's disappearance. He had been secretary-treasurer of the Club, the Gateway Curling Association, and the Golden Fancy Manufacturing Company, and he carried away with him the funds of all three.

The Club was forced to close. Most of the members were behind with their dues, the champagne importers of Montreal were suing, the interest on the building mortgage was overdue and unpaid, and now there was

not even money enough to heat the building. It had had a short but coruscating career.

The first and most startling result was its effect on Jimmy Gride. He had been wont to drown the memory of his marital infelicity in whisky and a large armchair near the window. He found himself out on the street. He drank some evil liquor and more of it than usual owing to having to stand at a bar, and went home earlier than he had done for a long time.

He found his wife entertaining a gentleman friend, and burst into the room with a revolver. The gentleman friend escaped with a bullet through the shoulder, but Gride and his wife were both dead by the time neighbours, alarmed by the shooting, had brought the police upon the scene. With the passing of the house among the poplars more of the gaiety of Gateway suffered eclipse.

Ming encountered Kenkenake upon the street. The man was walking along with a fixed and vacant look in his eyes and his huge jaw hanging slack. He started when Ming spoke to him.

"Why, hullo, old man, you don't look very chipper this morning."

"I let Huck Borowdell have some of my money," returned Kenkenake dully. "Dilly blames me for him goin' off with it."

He gave his shoulders a weary shake and went on.

Ming noticed under "Local and General" in the *Evening News*, a couple of days later :

"Mrs. G. G. Kenkenake and her mother, Mrs. Deaslip, left for Winnipeg on a visit on the noon train."

“Wonder if Kicky’s damned wife has dropped the poor old boy?” he mused. “Be a facer for him if she has.”

The Kenkenake house wore an empty look, and nothing was seen of its owner for three days. Curiosity prompted a neighbour to investigate, and he found the wretched man hanging from a beam in the basement and frozen stiff. A note said only that he was tired of life. Returning from the station, he had quietly gone down into the basement and hanged himself.

The devoted town was not even spared a final disaster, for one evening the great sawmill in Moab was found to be on fire. The whole building was of wood, and the flames had already obtained a firm hold. Nothing could be done in a furious wind at a temperature of thirty below zero, and the entire mill was reduced to ashes in a few hours.

The company announced that it would not rebuild. Gateway’s leading industry; the only one that had furnished any large amount of employment, and was on a paying basis, had come to an end. Moab became a collection of empty houses, and a fifth of the population of Gateway left for other lumbering centres.

Council meetings became a series of dreary and interminable wrangles. Some argued that the city should place itself without delay in the hands of receivers. But there were others more optimistic, and a certain amount of stubborn civic pride still remained. The old-timers might have been deficient in enterprise, but they still possessed the grim courage of pioneer days.

A few, Ming among them, still tried to cheer themselves with the assurance that Thunder Falls would yet

lead them out of the valley of the shadow into the sunshine of prosperity once more.

At last there arrived the promised letter from Curtis, laconic but pithy :

“ Come along down, son, fishing great. Good old American sucker taking any bait offered. No Canuck tightwads down here. Can use you right now selling five and ten-acre tracts, grow finest oranges in world soon as some genius discovers cheap and easy way make water run uphill. Hear Gateway on toboggan, knew it would happen soon. Grab everything and head south. Sunny California. Why freeze to death in that damnable climate ? Kindest regards to you and wife.”

Ming re-read the letter many times and was strongly tempted. He sounded Mattie upon the subject. A man should consult his wife when in doubt : then, if she agrees with him, and the event turns out ill, he can put the blame all on her shoulders. This is one of the consolations of matrimony. Somewhat to his surprise, she was reluctant to go.

“ But why do you want to stay ? ”

“ Oh, I don't know. I don't like Curtis, and besides, you know ? ”

“ Be damned if I do.”

“ Joe'll be out in July.”

“ The deuce he will. I'd forgotten that brother of yours.”

He retired to ponder. “ By gad, I'd like to go ; nothing very joyous about staying, and I've had about enough of

these blasted Arctic winters. I'd love to see old Hank again ; he's a cynic and a bit of a pirate, and he doesn't think much of Mattie, but his word was always good. The world's so full of damned liars that a man you can trust is one in a million. I've never seen Southern California, a great country by all accounts."

Then he shook his head and sighed. "No can do, a man's got to draw the line somewhere. I'm not as honest as I thought I was, but I'm not a deliberate swindler. I've put old Quantock in a hole, and I'll have to make at least a decent effort to pull him out. And Thunder Falls is my work. I used to be so proud of it, and as soon as the thing gets into difficulties I think of welching. Captain deserting his ship sort of thing. No, at least I ought to stop and see the thing through to the bitter end. Then, if there absolutely isn't anything I can do, I'll run down and join Hank. Damn Joe Seebright, I wish he had a life sentence."

He wrote to Curtis, telling him that there were various affairs that he would have to clear up before he could leave Gateway.

CHAPTER XVII

THE Superintendent of Public Utilities sent a report to the council to the effect that so many light, power and water accounts were in arrears that the municipal departments concerned were running behind. He asked permission to cut off service where bills remained unpaid.

The council shuffled the report off on the Board of Works. The Board of Works gave the Superintendent instructions to collect past due accounts, but implored him to use discretion. The Superintendent made a gallant effort, and found himself with an interesting collection of N.S.F. cheques in hand.

Then he bought himself a large bottle of whisky, seated himself before the telephone on his desk, opened the bottle, and issued drastic orders to his subordinates.

The Pootles were giving another dinner-party. Spring had come, and the big house was once more habitable. Half a cord of jackpine had been burned in the furnace to dispel the lingering chill, a girl had been hired to wait on table for the evening, and Mrs. Pootle had spent a busy day in the kitchen.

The Mings were among the invited guests. He was already dressed, but Mattie, in nothing to speak of, was moving about in her usual aimless way, the floor, the bed and the dressing-table strewn with her garments.

"You remind me of a kitten chasing its tail, sweetness. Why this thushness? You can only wear one dress at a time. Put something on and come along."

"But I can't make up my mind. All these things are so old; everybody's seen them a dozen times, and they aren't even in style. I haven't a thing fit to put on."

"You'll be as well dressed as any woman there."

"But I want to be better dressed."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Mattie, do put something on. I'll drag you over there just as you stand in a minute."

"There's someone at the door, Bert. If it's Mrs. Mobb-Widgley, tell her to come right up."

But it proved to be a brisk young man in overalls, who held out a bill and said in a parrot voice, "Pas' due account have t'pay up 'r I'll cut off y'r light Sup'tenden's orders."

"I'll give you a cheque," said Ming. "The thing slipped my mind, that's all."

"Can't take cheques, pay cash 'r I'll cut off y'r light, Sup'tenden's orders," repeated the young man. "Got to get the cash."

"What damned nonsense."

Ming rushed to the telephone and rang up the Superintendent's office. A thick and truculent voice answered, "Hullo, what you want?"

"This is Alderman Ming speaking. There's a man of yours here threatening to cut off my light. He won't take my cheque."

"Told'm not to take cheque," growled the voice. "Got too many bum cheques here now. Pay'm cash an' he'll beat it."

"But I haven't got the amount by me just at the moment."

"That's your tough luck, eh?" said the voice with a drunken chuckle.

"But my wife's dressing for a dinner-party, she can't dress in the dark."

"Let her go undressed—cause more sensation that way."

"Look here, blast you," roared Ming, "do you know who you're talking to? I'm Alderman Ming. I'll have you sacked."

"Don't give a damn if you're the Almighty's uncle. Put up or shut up, tha's all I got to say."

The receiver crashed in Ming's ear. At the same moment the light went out. He looked out of the window and saw a man descending the pole before the house from which the wires were strung. Mattie's excited squeals took him upstairs again, but his explanation did not at all satisfy her.

"You're a fine kind of an alderman if they can cut the lights off on you and get away with it."

"Mattie, will you kindly shut up. I feel like smacking somebody, and you're far too close for your own safety. If I don't get that drunken swine sacked to-morrow——"

"Light a match, Bert, and quit blowing about what you'll do to him when you catch him. I'll never get dressed this way."

He lit a series of matches while she completed her toilette in a peevish and complaining mood. "I bet I'm a sight. I've a good notion to stay home."

"Oh, dry up and come along. You're the most annoying female in existence at times."

"Gee, you're cranky, what's your rush? You always walk as if you were going to a fire. The Pootles will be there when we get to 'em."

The Pootles were there and all the other guests, even the Mobb-Widgleys. Dinner-parties had been lamentably few of late, and the pair had been living chiefly on tea and toast since the worthy butler of the Earl of Oxminster had informed his son that he had wasted all the old man's savings, and would have to fend for himself henceforward.

The party was much smaller. The Kenkenakes were gone, and Oppenshaw was peddling wildcat oil stocks in Alberta. Miss Daisy Locke had keenly resented the previous reference to flour-bag underwear, and several others had fled the poverty-stricken town.

There was no wine this time, and the girl hired for the evening was heavy-footed and a laboured breather. She snuffled in the ears of the guests as she served them. Mr. Pootle was subdued to his natural grey, and no one present wore new clothes.

But Mrs. Pootle still billowed out of her crimson silk, her smile still shone like the sun, and her powerful voice dominated the shrunken assembly even more completely than on the previous occasion.

"Well, folks, not so many frills this trip, but there's still plenty of good grub. Eat hearty, an' if there ain't enough I'll go out an' kill the pig."

"Oh, Mrs. Pootle, do you keep a pig?" gurgled Mrs. Mobb-Widgley.

"No, it's just a way of talkin', my old dad used to say that. I remember he did go out one day to kill the pig, but the derved Nitchies had went off with it. Them

was the days. That winter we had to live on spuds, an' the half of 'em froze at that. We got some swell belly-aches out of them frosted spuds."

Mrs. Mobb-Widgley looked shocked, but she was too hungry to stand on her dignity.

"Well, it looks like we struck hard times again," went on their hostess. "That's always the way in the West, up an' down like a yard and a half of pump water. I don't think we'll put in another winter in this shack; but what of it, we had a swell time while the goin' was good. Hi'll have to hunt him a job, I guess."

A heavy double knock echoed through the house. The waitress stamped out of the room, and returned to stick her broad face in at the door and shout, "Feller askin' for Mr. Pootle."

Ming had a sad foreboding of what was about to happen, and a glance along the table convinced him that he was not alone in his fears. A silence fell upon them as they listened to Mr. Pootle's faint and deprecatory tones, answered by a brisk and peremptory voice. He returned with bowed shoulders and a shamed and pathetic look in his eyes.

"Some fellers came about the electric light," he mumbled. "The thing slipped my mind. The young fool won't take a cheque."

"They just cut off my light," avowed Ming, to save the poor wretch further embarrassment.

"And mine," admitted another guest gallantly.

"Me too," said a third with a sickly laugh.

Mrs. Mobb-Widgley's sanguine face turned pale, and she bowed her head over her plate, for her house also was in darkness.

Ming sprang to his feet. "I'm taking up a collection," he announced briskly. "We can't let an excellent dinner like this be ruined by darkness."

He made a bag of his napkin, dropped fifty cents into it, and passed round the table. Hands dived hastily into trouser pockets, there were some mumbled excuses about money "left in my other pants," but he returned to his host with a good handful of silver.

The man at the door was satisfied and went away. Mr. Pootle returned to his chair with dragging feet.

"I feel cheap," said Mrs. Pootle, "I feel cheap." Large tears were trickling down her broad cheeks.

Ming was up again in an instant. "I wish to assure you of my deepest respect, Mrs. Pootle. I feel sure you haven't fallen an iota in the esteem of anyone present. We admire your courage, and I hope we can all learn from you how to bear our own troubles."

"This is the real old Western hospitality," said the deep voice of old McKee from the end of the table. "In them days we shared our last bit of bannock with any stranger who asked for it. It ain't the first time Mary's done a thing like this. I remember when I was with a bunch of hungry freighters back in——"

"You shut up, Andy."

"I don't have to, Mary. Didn't you feed nine starvin' men with the last sack of flour you had on the place?"

"What of it? Shut up, I don't want to hear any more about it. Here's the dinner gettin' cold, folks, eat it up, eat it up. This here's the last dinner-party we'll ever give in this house—the mortgage company's takin' it away from us—but let's make it a good one."

They did so with more genuine and unaffected mirth and good fellowship than had been displayed at any social function in Gateway since the days before the boom.

"By Jove," said Ming on their way home, "there still are a few people in this town you can like and respect."

"A fine show you made of yourself," observed Mattie acidly. "You didn't have to tell anyone they'd cut the light off on us."

"Beloved of my soul, there are some things a woman never understands."

Ruin. The once thronged streets of the little city presented only a few listless figures ; many of the stores were closed, nearly half the houses vacant. Uncompleted buildings told one tale, and yawning excavations for others that had been projected, amplified it.

No sewers were being laid and no sidewalks, and newly-graded streets pushed out into the country were fast being overgrown with grass and willows. The brickyards surrounding the town were melancholy pits in which rainwater collected and the kilns were black and cold. The strident voice of the last saw-mill had been stilled forever.

Incoming trains brought only discouraged commercial travellers and gloomy collectors, the mails bulged with duns. As in old days, the only business in town was the trade in furs and farm produce.

The North Western Railway had gone into bankruptcy ; the steel had stopped short some miles from the town, and on the unballasted grade the weeds were

growing. Creditors were carrying away everything of value from the works inaugurated with such pomp by Mr. Julius Nenger. Thunder Falls continued to roar in a solitude peopled by a single watchman on guard over the abandoned dam.

With taxes uncollected, the bank refused to lend any more money to pay interest on debentures, and the debenture holders were uttering ferocious threats.

Ming attended the council meeting at which the final blow fell. Mayor Smithers rose to announce almost with tears in his voice that all negotiations for the sale of the unfinished works at the Falls had fallen through, and that they must remain uncompleted.

It was estimated that to finish the work and bring the plant into operation would require at least a quarter of a million dollars, and the city had already spent more than half a million. He did not add, though it was now an open secret, that there had been graft all along the line, from Dyke Flanneler down to the meanest sub-contractor.

The council, with no heart left even for wrangles and recriminations, adjourned at an unusually early hour and plodded dismally home on foot, for cars had again become scarce in Gateway.

It was a mid-July evening, calm and warm. The pearly light on the northern horizon lent an air of ineffable peace and solace to the landscape. Early though it was, no one was abroad, and there was nothing to distract Ming's attention from the condition of his affairs as he tramped slowly up the hill and along Hillcrest Drive.

He passed house after deserted house, silent and desolate and dark. There had hardly been a building

there two short years ago, but a twelve-month ago everyone had been occupied by people looking forward to endless and increasing prosperity.

His own house must soon be vacated too. Though he had been fortunate enough to sell his car, he still owed the bank not only for his own note, but for the one he had backed for Kenkenake. He had not earned a hundred dollars all told in the past four months: his office rent was in arrears, his telephone had been disconnected, his lights cut off, and he would not be able to meet the half-yearly interest on the mortgage on his home.

He had no anxiety for himself and few regrets. To be penniless was no new experience, and one that had never caused him any great anxiety. It was Mattie he was thinking of.

"It'll be hard on her, and she'll be hard on me. Not much use looking to her for sympathy and help. I suppose all wives are like that, pleasant companions in fair weather, but rotten poor in bad. I've certainly learnt a lot in three years—a liberal education, begad, marriage is.

"I thought I was marrying an angel almost too bright and good for earth. I got a woman who's greedy and idle and incompetent, a finished and amazing liar, and a thorough-going thief. She's untidy and unpunctual, and I'll be damned if she can ever make up her mind about anything.

"Sounds pretty bad—a man like that would get himself kicked ten times a day, but a woman's different. Damn it, she can't help herself; she's not really so bad after all. I expect, if the truth were known, I've got a first-class wife, as wives go. I might have married

a Dilly Kenkenake, or a Widge or a Gride. Mattie's still the handsomest woman in Gateway, and she has the sweetest voice. She's really pretty good-tempered, and she doesn't hold spite. I'm pretty nasty with her myself at times—oh, I'm no plaster saint, I mustn't forget that. And, by God, she never nags. If I had a nagger I'd choke the brute to death.

“ I guess Mattie's just got the qualities natural to her sex, and several virtues that most women haven't got. It's no use talking. I'm fond of her, and I certainly have let her down pretty badly. It's a man's first duty to protect his women-folk, and I've been no shining light at it. I'll have to do a great deal better before I have any right to abuse her. She's done all you can expect a woman to do, but I haven't done my part.

“ No use trying to hang on any longer, might as well turn the house over to the mortgage company, and let the bank whistle for their money if they can't realize anything on the collateral. I can probably get enough out of the furniture at an auction sale to buy our tickets to California, and Curtis'll give me something to do.”

He saw a light in his house as he turned in off the road ; but Mattie often sat up for him, and the door was not locked. He walked briskly into the hall, and halted dead at the sight of a stranger seated on the couch with Mattie in his arms.

She sprang up at once with staring eyes and a pale face, and ran to him.

“ It's only Joe,” she panted. “ Bert, it's Joe ; don't look like that.”

He took a deep breath and essayed a smile.

"My dear, I wish you'd have a little consideration for the weak state of my health. One does not expect such things off the stage."

He was looking intently at his brother-in-law by the light of the oil-lamp they had had to substitute for the electric light.

His first and strongest impression was that there was little likeness between brother and sister. Joe was dark, slender, hollow-chested and of middle height, though his excessive thinness might be due to the notorious unhealthiness of prison life. His unwholesome pallor and his grey hair might also be ascribable to the same cause.

But he was of a different fundamental type from Mattie, different in build, in colouring, one might almost say in race. Yet he was indubitably a stranger, and Mattie could hardly have an intrigue with a man he had never seen, for by now he had come to know most of the population of Gateway by sight at any rate.

All this passed through his head in a few seconds, but still left a feeling of puzzlement and dissatisfaction behind.

He said in a tone that hovered between cordiality and hostility, "Good evening, Seebright. Mattie didn't tell me you would be here to-night."

Seebright had risen stiffly. He gave Ming a peculiar glance and a nervous twitch of a smile, and murmured something.

"He didn't like to come here in daylight," Mattie cut in hastily. "It don't get dark till so late these days. He just walked in on me a few minutes ago. I nearly

died. Shake hands with him, Bert ; the poor boy never did you any harm."

With a slight inward shrinking, Ming took the limp, inert hand and let it drop. The man's evident illness excited his compassion, but he could not pretend he was pleased to see him.

"I'm afraid you've—er—come at a bad time," he said. "Fact is, this town's blinking—no—on the blink. There really isn't a thing to be had. I don't quite know what I'm going to do myself."

"Yes, I was just telling him we're broke," said Mattie, and laughed in a strained fashion. "But he said he was willing to take me off your hands."

Ming stiffened. "I'm not in the habit of asking another man to take care of my wife," he said coldly.

"Oh, but Bert, you don't understand. I've got to go with Joe. I can't explain, but I must. I thought we'd slip away before you got back from council, and just leave a little note, and then you'd have no more trouble with me."

"I don't see the least reason for such a thing," said Ming with rising annoyance. "My God, Mattie, I'm still able to take care of you. I'm not absolutely destitute yet. If you have an explanation, I certainly think I'm entitled to it."

"But, Bert, you don't understand, I've always been with Joe. I was with him a long time before I ever met you."

"That's natural enough ; but, hang it all, Mattie, a woman's expected to prefer her husband to her brother."

"Bert, he isn't my brother."

"Then who the devil is he?"

"He's my husband."

Ming took a firm grip on the back of a chair and stared at her dazedly. Seebright had sunk upon the couch again, his face expressing resignation and a faintly sardonic amusement.

"Does it occur to you," asked Ming in a hoarse voice at last, "that I can have you jailed for bigamy?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I used to be scared of that," she replied coolly, "but not after I came to know you."

She came close to him and spoke in the coaxing voice he had always found it so hard to resist.

"You would have me, you know, Bert. I tried to get out of marrying you, but I loved you too, nearly as much as I love Joe. And I've been faithful to you, I have so. I had lots of chances: Ben Oppenshaw wanted me to run away with him, and young McHarg. But I never let one of 'em so much as hold my hand. And I know you've been awful good to me, and we've been pretty happy together, haven't we? You wouldn't have me jailed after that, Bert? You wouldn't ever have the heart to do such a thing."

Ming passed his hand across his eyes in a bewildered gesture.

"I was all alone in the world," she went on, "and hadn't anybody to take care of me, only poor Joe. I didn't mean to be any trouble to you. If you hadn't come home so early from council we'd have been gone, and you wouldn't have had any more trouble with me. You're not going to be mean to me, honey, not after you've always been so good?"

"What I can't understand is how you let her do such a thing?" Ming inquired of Seebright.

The ex-convict smiled faintly. "Ever tried to stop Mat doing anything she had a notion to?" he countered.

Ming felt the argument valid as far as it went.

"First time she told me what she was going to do," continued Seebright, "I pretty near went through the roof. But she came in as my sister, see? I couldn't talk to her alone—guard right there listening to every word. What chance did I have? Just get her in trouble and do nobody any good. Said she was broke and up against it, and I couldn't get any money to her. I had to think of her, I couldn't get out, I had to think of her. See my position?"

Ming sank wearily into a chair, and Mattie went and perched herself on the arm of the couch beside Seebright.

"It appears," said Ming slowly, "that you're more wronged than I am. And you don't seem to feel any resentment against her."

Seebright's faint smile returned and he shook his head. "What's the use, Mattie's the way she is? She's a woman. You know her. I had her four years, you had her getting on three. Did you ever get any good of trying to put reason in her head?"

"Well, no, can't say I have," admitted Ming, smiling wryly.

"And you won't. You got to take her the way you find her. She's a good kid, one of the best living—if a man can put up with her ways. Appears like we can, but we can't both have her, eh?"

Ming nodded. "And it appears you have the prior claim."

Mattie sprang up and flung an affectionate arm over his shoulders. "Then you won't make any trouble for us, Bert? You won't, will you now?" She gave him a little shake and ruffled his hair with her hand.

"No, no, no, of course not," he answered between laughter and a sick feeling of despair. "Go over now and sit by your really truly husband, that's a good girl. It's against my principles to take liberties with another man's wife—if I know she's his wife."

"And you're not mad at me?"

"I think I am, I don't think I've ever been so angry with you. Damn it all, Mattie, you've done me a dirty trick. Why couldn't you have told me the simple truth?"

"Well, then, I couldn't have married you. It wouldn't have worked out the other way, and I couldn't get along without a man."

Ming felt himself grow cold and then hot and feverish. He had a mad desire to rise and destroy things, and looked at Seebright with extreme distaste. He got up and began to pace the room with long strides, making aimless gestures and barking out inchoate sentences.

"I didn't mind so much your playing the fool as long as I was your legal husband. There are times when you're the most exasperating animal on earth. A man idiot enough to get married at all has to put up with that kind of thing. But there's a limit, there's a limit. I'll be damned, I've had enough. I don't want to do you any harm and I don't wish you any ill in the world, but, you know, there's a limit. I've had enough. You

were talking about slipping out before I got home. Why didn't you? More of your damned procrastination, you never could get ready in time. But you'd better go, better go at once, or I can't answer for myself."

"And can I take my things?"

"Yes, yes, take anything you want, anything that belongs to you. But hurry up. Get your damned things and get out. I've had enough."

Mattie pulled Seebright up from the couch by the arm. "Come on, Joe, he's mad," she said urgently. "Come and give me a hand."

Ming, continuing to pace up and down the room, heard them moving about upstairs, and Mattie's voice giving directions and complaining that she had lost this, mislaid that, and couldn't find the other. But they were down again in a surprisingly short time, Mattie bearing a bulging suit-case and Seebright struggling with another. She was wearing her fur coat, and had stuffed the pockets with all they would hold.

"I just took my own stuff, honey," she said in a wheedling voice, "just my own stuff. Joe's grip is out in the kitchen, can I get that?"

"Of course, if it's his."

She brought it in. It seemed very heavy, and Ming wondered vaguely what there could be in it, but he asked no questions.

"Well, we're going now," said Mattie with a forced giggle. "So long, Bert, dear; you been awful good to me."

He had for a moment a wild and primitive urge to break Joe Seebright's neck and beat Mattie into submission, but he curbed it.

“ Good-bye,” he said gruffly.

He had never felt so bereft, so lonely and desolate in all his life as he watched the pair go heavily down the path and fade into the darkness.

He walked slowly back through the sitting-room into the dark dining-room beyond. Mechanically he pulled out a chair and sat down, resting his elbow on the table and his forehead on his hand. Suddenly he put both hands before his eyes and fell forward on his face, shaken with long sobs that seemed to tear him apart.

After a long time he got up and began to grope about in the corner by the sideboard until he found his gun-case. He fitted the shot-gun together, loaded the right barrel and cocked it, put the muzzle to his temple, the gun-butt resting on the floor, and reached his long arm down to the trigger.

He hesitated a moment, and put the gun away from him with decision. “ No, by God, I’m not Kenkenake,” he said defiantly aloud. “ No woman’s worth it. Damn all women.”

He left the gun lying there, and marched upstairs. He kicked off his shoes and flung himself on the bed in all his clothes, and sank in a few minutes into a heavy sleep.

He awoke hours later, sat up and blinked. He had his clothes on, and where was Mattie? Then he remembered, and sank back again with a groan. Perhaps he had made a mistake not to pull the trigger overnight.

He struggled upright again. The room looked as if it had been looted by bandits; clothes lay strewn upon the floor with more than Mattie’s usual untidiness; the dressing-table drawers had been pulled right out;

the cupboard in the corner stood open and empty. He examined the mess with an incurious eye, and began mechanically to pick up the scattered garments as he had so often done before. It came to him gradually that they were only old and worn things, and a closer survey showed him that she had overlooked nothing of value.

He threw those he had gathered up in a pile on the bed and went downstairs. In the dining-room he noticed that the drawer in the sideboard was partly open, and a second glance told him that the silver was missing. In a flash he understood why the bag Mattie had brought in from the kitchen had been so heavy. A complete survey of the house showed that everything of any immediate money value had been taken, down even to two little silver photograph frames.

The knowledge had the curious effect of cheering him immensely.

"Well, I felt a bit contrite," he mused. "Thought perhaps I'd been a little rough on poor Mattie, kicking her out into the street in the middle of the night. But she and her jailbird husband had bally well looted the house before I got home. It's lucky she didn't think of picking my pocket—not that she'd have got much. That's a woman for you—they're all the same."

He sat down and spread his money on the table: a five-dollar bill, two ones, and forty-five cents in silver, and grinned at it. "Jove, I've got nearly as much as I had when I first saw this cursed town—but look at all the debts I've acquired. Wonder if those pirates left anything to eat in the kitchen."

There was food in the cupboard, and he cooked himself a breakfast with the expertness of long practice. Then

he lit his pipe and flung himself back in his chair to meditate.

There can be no reasonable doubt that this world is the property of some satyr god, not too intelligent, who beguiles with it the infinite tedium of immortality. Laughter, man's only answer to the brutalities of fate, bubbled up in Ming's soul. Bitterer than gall at first, he let it flow on until it ran clear and sweet.

"What a rag! What a perfectly gorgeous rag! Came in here without a stiver; rose rapidly by my own brilliant exertions to wealth, fortune and the Dukedom of Gateway; accumulated a house, a motor car and a wife. Lost them all, as it were, at one fell stroke.

"Flat broke to the wide world. But I've learnt my lesson: I'm a free man once more, and no woman will ever pull a noose round my neck again. And yet it's lonely without Mattie. I can't seem to remember any but the good times we've had together. What next, I wonder? Life can hardly have anything else to show me. Have to take up my travels again, I suppose. Well, here goes for California and Curtis."

But it was otherwise willed of the fates. That was on July 19th, 1914, and here was a man barely thirty who felt he had known and exhausted all that life had to offer. But life is infinitely various. Look at one more picture.

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“ Where ? ” inquires Sergeant M. C. Ming, “ B ” Coy, First Saskatchewan Regiment, “ Where’d that one go ? ”

THE END

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